

The Stories Behind the Remarkable Journey of
THE 23 WOMEN WHO ROCKED THE WORLD

MY CUP | OUR CUP

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**SERENA
WILLIAMS**
And
Her Summer
Of Slam



From left:
Julie Johnston
Abby Wambach
Alex Morgan
Carli Lloyd
Hope Solo
Becky Sauerbrunn
Megan Rapinoe

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON BRUTY
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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LINEUP

7.20.15

2015 | VOLUME 123 | NO. 2



WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

38

CARLI
LLOYD

The midfielder dominated in the final—and struck a wonder of a goal—as the U.S. claimed its record third trophy, but a dozen years ago she nearly gave up the game

By Grant Wahl

**SI HAS AN UNPRECEDENTED 24
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Simon Bruty for Sports Illustrated

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Shannon Boxx



Morgan Brian



Lori Chalupny



Whitney Engen



Ashlyn Harris



Tobin Heath



Lauren Holiday



Julie Johnston



Meghan Klingenberg



Ali Krieger



Sydney Leroux



Carli Lloyd

Sports Illustrated

LINEUP



Alex Morgan



Alyssa Naeher



Kelley O'Hara



Heather O'Reilly



Christen Press



Christie Rampone



Megan Rapinoe



Amy Rodriguez



Becky Sauerbrunn



Hope Solo



Abby Wambach



Jill Ellis

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**Leading
Off**

+

1
of
3

A Yen For Your Thoughts

■ Japan midfielder Mizuho Sakaguchi contemplated the disastrous scenario unfolding—a 2-0 deficit in the fifth minute in the Women's World Cup final—as U.S. midfielder Carli Lloyd celebrated her second goal, on a scramble off a free kick. Lloyd was only getting warmed up: She completed her hat trick in the 16th minute on a stunning chip from midfield to lead the U.S. to a 5-2 win over the defending champs and a record third World Cup title (page 38).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MADDIE MEYER
FIFA/GETTY IMAGES









+

2
3**Leading
Off**

Hope And Glory

■ **Goalkeeper**
Hope Solo stood under the Women's World Cup trophy, encircled by her teammates at Vancouver's BC Place Stadium after the U.S.'s first finals victory in 16 years. Voted the Golden Glove winner as the best keeper in the tournament, Solo played every minute of the U.S.'s seven matches and allowed just three goals while making 15 saves.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
SIMON BRUTY
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



Leading
Off



3
of
3

Treasure Island

■ With the World Cup trophy in one hand, a key to New York City in the other and a champion's medal around her neck, midfielder Megan Rapinoe revealed at City Hall in Manhattan last Friday. Earlier, tens of thousands of flag-waving, *USA!*-chanting fans turned out to honor the USWNT with a ticker-tape parade in the Canyon of Heroes. The last time female athletes got such a reception was in 1984, in a celebration of all medal winners from the Los Angeles Summer Olympics.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
ANTHONY CAUSI
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





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Jordan Spieth could very well be the American Pharoah of golf. If he should go on and capture the claret jug at the British Open, your next cover should be a shot of Spieth holding the reins of the Triple Crown winner.

Bill Irwin
Peabody, Mass.



SCORECARD

If I were Alex Rodriguez, I wouldn't buy a home run baseball from a guy who says he caught 8,000 baseballs hit into the stands. Looking at Zack Hamble's photo, I assume he started this well before he left the womb.

Ray Catalino
Stillwater, Okla.



POINT AFTER

I agree with **Michael Rosenberg's** points about technology ruining fan balloting for the MLB All-Star Game. What sense does it make to be able to vote up to 35 times in one day?

Dusty Fors, Green Bay

COVER

PAGE
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INBOX

FOR JUNE 29, 2015

To hear Sergio García and Ian Poulter complain about the conditions at **Chambers Bay** during the U.S. Open was a complete disgrace. Every player had to play on the same greens.

Chris Lang, Bethlehem, Pa.

The PGA plans to return the U.S. Open to Chambers Bay? The course was terrible for the players, caddies and spectators. The highlight was watching the course marshal hold up a sign trying to silence the passing freight trains.

George Mather, Brockville, Ont.

The latest evidence that **Pete Rose** lied about betting on baseball as a player shows just how much he compromised the game. Even if Rose only bet on his team to win, bookies would know that when he did not bet on his team, he believed they would lose. This is exactly the sort of inside tip that baseball forbids.

David Machlowitz, Westfield, N.J.



CORRECTION ▼

In our Where Are They Now story about Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (July 6-13), we stated that "a drug called Gleevec has allowed him to live a better life," successfully treating his leukemia. In fact, although he has used Gleevec, it is a different drug, Tasigna, that he credits with improving his life. Abdul-Jabbar is a spokesperson for Novartis, which manufactures both Gleevec and Tasigna.

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SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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My first catch wasn't a football.

It was a bullhead. Across the road from the house I grew up in, there was a little bend in the creek where the water ran deep. This was my favorite spot to fish. My brother and I would spend our summer days there, pulling fish out by the dozens. What can I say? I guess I'm just good at catching things.



Jordy Nelson



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ALWAYS ANGLING

Texas rookie Alex “Chi Chi” Gonzalez studies species and geography to find fish wherever he goes.

FLORIDA AND TEXAS offer some of the best fishing in the United States. Both are pockmarked with ponds for freshwater fishing, and have coastlines for saltwater fishing. Texas Rangers pitcher and Florida native Alex “Chi Chi” Gonzalez is trying to fish them all.

“Everywhere I go, I check a map and search around for water,” says Gonzalez. “I do my research and prepare myself for the battle so that hopefully I catch a big one.”

The Rangers’ 2013 first-round draft pick has already made a splash in his first major league season. His brief minor league career included stops in Spokane, Wash., and Myrtle Beach, Fla., and the 23-year-old Gonzalez made sure to explore the local fishing.

“In Myrtle, I lived right by a canal, and I was there every day,” says Gonzalez. “I probably caught the same bass a couple of times—I should have marked it to see if it was the same one!”

Gonzalez grew up in Delray Beach, Fla., a mile from the ocean and a short bike trip from dozens of ponds. At eight years old, he dropped a line in a pond on a family camping trip and caught a passion for the sport.

“My mom loves telling the story,” he says. “I was fishing with dead shrimp and a little sinker. I threw it in, and the reel starts screaming. Of course, the first thing I ever caught was a stingray.”

Unsatisfied, Gonzalez begged to return to the same spot the next weekend.

“This time, I ended up catching a little snook,” he says. “That’s what started it all—doing the research on that fish, seeing the sizes it can grow to, learning about the challenge of catching a snook. That’s what feeds me and keeps

me going back for more.”

Gonzalez is something of an amateur ichthyologist, researching different species and finding nearby spots that offer a bit more than your standard bass or trout. “I want to print out a big picture of all the species and put a little check mark after I catch them,” says Gonzalez.

When the Rangers are at home, Gonzalez arrives early at Globe Life Park most days since discovering a small pond across the street with some decent-sized fish. But he believes nothing compares to the fishing in his home state. “There’s nothing like a Florida bass,” says Gonzalez. “Even in Texas, they have Florida bass.”

Gonzalez heads home during the off-season for monthly camping trips with his family. This past winter, Gonzalez and his father fished Lake Kissimmee in Central Florida and the canals in the Florida Keys, where the two snagged a trophy redfish.

“I don’t know if it’s because we were out in the sun for hours that made it taste so good,” says Gonzalez, “or that it was the best fight I’ve had in a while. But the taste of that redfish fried up was even better.” —Evan Scott Schwartz



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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH



SCOREBOARD

Flee Agent

The DeAndre Jordan flip-flop between the Mavericks and Clippers made a farce of NBA free agency, bumping Dallas owner Mark Cuban from the shark tank to the biggest loser

BY BEN GOLLIVER

THE WEAKEST LINK of the NBA off-season turned out to be a 6' 11" dunking machine who credits his "Wolverine-like bone structure" for his impeccable health. Height and durability—as well as prolific rebounding and shot blocking—will generate interest during the free-agency period, but it takes good judgment and integrity to complete a deal. Enter DeAndre Jordan, whose decision to renege on a verbal agreement with the Mavericks called into question the workability of the league's free agency moratorium.

Jordan eventually came

to the right conclusion by re-signing with the Clippers, taking a four-year, \$88 million max contract. It should have been an easy call. In L.A., Jordan enjoys sunshine, a pair of All-Star teammates in point guard Chris Paul and power forward Blake Griffin, an endlessly supportive coach in Doc Rivers and a chance to compete for a title every year.

How Jordan, 26, reached his decision was the problem. On July 3, reports surfaced that he and Dallas had come to a handshake agreement, the only

allowable deal during the eight-day moratorium that the league needs to close its books from the previous year and calculate the new salary cap. After that, Mavericks owner Mark Cuban reached a four-year deal with shooting guard Wesley Matthews, leading other free agents linked to Dallas to move on. By July 6, Jordan was expressing second thoughts to intermediaries, news that got back to Rivers and effectively reopened the courtship. Two days later Jordan was merrily hosting a Clippers contingent at his Houston home, where Griffin jokingly tweeted a photo of a chair barricading Jordan's front door, as if to bar the Mavs. At no point did he directly inform Cuban of his about-face. At no point did he announce his change of heart.

Dozens of free agents reached agreements with teams before Jordan officially signed with the

Clippers on July 9. Jilted, Dallas cobbled together alternate plans, but its entire summer was shot by Jordan's waffling. Cuban had no recourse: Jordan's verbal agreement on a four-year, \$80 million contract was nonbinding, and he broke no NBA rules by changing his mind.

Thankfully, Jordan's reversal didn't set off a chain reaction, as other free agents and teams held fast to their deals. Mavericks forward and

chief recruiter Chandler Parsons called Jordan's conduct "unprofessional," and Cuban rejected a public apology from Jordan, which finally came via Twitter on July 10. To make matters worse for Cuban, the NBA fined him \$25,000 for discussing his agreement with Jordan during the moratorium, which is against league rules.

There's simply no excusing Jordan's behavior. He and his agent, Dan Fegan, had years to

prepare for his free agency and months to weigh his options. His reasons for choosing Dallas—returning to his home state, taking on a larger offensive role, becoming the face of a franchise—were his alone. The damage to Dallas could have been significantly reduced if he'd taken a more deliberative approach.

In the aftermath, some called on the NBA to shorten its moratorium. Cuban disagreed, arguing that the fiasco wasn't a

product of the system, and he's right. The NBA's board of governors can tighten its summer timeline, but it will never be able to legislate away rash decision-making and spineless behavior.

Hopefully the affair and the outrage it provoked will serve as a learning experience. After all, Jordan's new contract lets him become a free agent again in 2018. How many teams will he choose then? □

WINNERS/LOSERS

Together, the NBA's 30 teams handed out more than \$2.5 billion worth of contracts to free agents in less than a week. Not all of that money was spent wisely —B.G.



BUCKS

A laughingstock two years ago, up-and-coming Milwaukee beat out the large-market Lakers and Knicks to sign **Greg Monroe** (three years, \$50 million). The 6'11" post scorer fills a need for a team that excelled defensively but ranked 22nd on offense.

HEAT

Talks with guard **Dwyane Wade** eventually produced a team-friendly, one-year, \$20 million deal. Miami can now make a run at the 2016 playoffs without having compromised its position in next summer's Kevin Durant sweepstakes.

SPURS

They poached All-Star power forward **LaMarcus Aldridge** (four years, \$84.1 million) and re-signed Tim Duncan, Kawhi Leonard, Manu Ginóbili and Danny Green. Those deals impressed forward David West so much that he took the vet's minimum of \$1.4 million.



NETS

Bogged down by bloated contracts, GM Billy King had to settle for re-signing center **Brook Lopez** (three years, \$60 million) and forward Thaddeus Young (four years, \$50 million), while buying out point guard Deron Williams. More tedious, forgettable ball awaits.

BLAZERS

Not only did president Neil Olshey lose four starters, including Aldridge, but he also failed to land comparable replacements. Like point guard **Damian Lillard**, the one returner, Portland will be offensively potent but defensively deficient in 2016-17.

PISTONS

Stan Van Gundy is the latest hybrid coach-executive to struggle with roster-building. Monroe left for no return, and deals for point guard Reggie Jackson (five years, \$80 million) and center Aron Baynes (three years, \$20 million) seem overly generous.

Ken Stabler

1945–2015

BY TIM LAYDEN

WE MOURN THE passing of great athletes for the splendor of their work, for titles won and records set, for moments given to those of us who can only watch and for memories made that will outlive their mortal selves, and ours. Yet on occasion death comes to an athlete who lived a life so large that it nearly obscures his work, blending the man and the legend. Former NFL quarterback Ken (the Snake) Stabler, leader of the outlaw Oakland Raiders of the 1970s, who died last week at age 69 from complications associated with colon cancer, was just such an athlete. He was respected for his work on the football field and mythologized for his life off it.

Stabler was inarguably one of the best quarterbacks of his era, a 6' 3", 215-pound lefthander who played for Bear Bryant at Alabama with a silky delivery and good knees. The former would endure, the latter would not. Drafted in 1968, he was the NFL MVP in '74 and led the Raiders over the Vikings in Super Bowl XI in January 1977. He was accurate before accuracy became commonplace: In that championship season of '76 he completed a then NFL-record 66.7% of his passes when the league average was 52.2%. (In 2014, Tony Romo led the NFL at 69.9%, but the league average was 62.6%.) Stabler's work was more instinctive than learned. "I didn't study in front of film,



like a Peyton Manning," he told author Peter Richmond in the 2010 book *Badasses: The Legend of Snake, Foo, Dr. Death and John Madden's Oakland Raiders*. "I went out and played the game. It was a simpler time. The defenses weren't sophisticated. But I didn't study the game."

He was at his best in the closing minutes of a tight game, as cool inside his helmet as the sweaty blond hair that flowed out of it. Upon the news of Stabler's passing, Madden said, "I've often said, if I had one drive to win a game to this day, and I had a quarterback to pick, I would pick Kenny." It was Stabler who came off the bench in 1972 and led the Raiders to the go-ahead touchdown against the Steelers that preceded the Immaculate Reception. And in 1974 it was Stabler who completed the unlikely touchdown pass to Clarence Davis—the so-called Sea of Hands reception in a divisional playoff game that eliminated the two-time defending Super Bowl champion Dolphins.

Those are the football moments. Stabler is just as



SNAKE, CHARMER Stabler—who had a career record, postseason included, of 103-54-1 with one Super Bowl victory between 1970 and '84—played hard on and off the field.

+ To read Robert F. Jones's 1977 SI cover story on Stabler, go to SI.com/stabler

excitedly recalled for the nights spent swilling booze and shooting pool in Oakland, Alabama and many places in between, a symbol of the play-hard, party-harder Raiders and a man who stood on the cultural fence that separated Bobby Layne's generation from Tom Brady's. In the summer of 1977, *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* writer Robert F. Jones spent a week with Stabler, much of it in his beloved Alabama hometown of Foley and in nearby Gulf Shores.

Early in the cover story Jones summarized the rollicking tale that would follow: "The week shot by

like a long wet blur. Through it ran the sounds of Stablerian pleasure: the steady gurgle of upturned beer bottles, the clack and thunk of pool balls, the snarl of outboard motors, the whiny cadences of country music. At the end of it, anyone following in Stabler's wake would be ready for a body transplant: liver and lights, heart and kidneys, eardrums—maybe even a few new teeth."

And this was the Snake, a species nearly extinct: a man who could outdrink you on Friday night and beat you on the field two days later. Stabler's family said he died in some small way just as he lived, with Lynyrd Skynyrd's music in the air. Forever the rebel. □

GO FIGURE

1,020

Weight, in pounds, deadlifted by Eddie Hall at the World's Strongest Man competition on Saturday in Leeds, England, to set a new record. Hall's total was 28 pounds more than the amount lifted that day by Hafthór Björnsson, who plays Gregor (the Mountain) Clegane in HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

1,112

Time, in hours, it took ultramarathoner Scott Jurek to run all 2,189 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Jurek's 46-day, eight-hour journey began May 27 at Georgia's Springer Mountain and reached the summit of Maine's Mount Katahdin on Sunday.

108

Age of Mariners fan Evelyn Jones, who last Saturday became the oldest person to throw out a first pitch at a major league game, at Safeco Field before Seattle's 5-0 win over the Angels.



THEY SAID IT

"I WAS DOZING OFF. HE CAN TALK. A LOT."

Jadeveon Clowney
Texans
linebacker, recalling the experience of being recruited by Alabama coach Nick Saban in the new book *Saban: The Making of a Coach*.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Wimbledon.

**Becky Hammon**

Spurs assistant coaches the team's summer league squad. Her July 11 debut is a 78-73 loss to the Knicks but a great day for women in sports.

**Seminole**

Two assault accusations against footballers in a week cause coach Jimbo Fisher to ban his team from going to clubs. A great day for women in sports bars.



+ Dan Patrick is on vacation. JUST MY TYPE will return in the next issue.



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RUNNING

+

Simpson, Eh?

U.S. distance
running's new leader

JENNY SIMPSON

watched the 2004 women's Olympic marathon on television. She was 17 then and still Jenny Barringer, an eight-time Florida state champion in track and cross-country who was about to head off to run at Colorado. Watching U.S. marathoner Deena Kastor win bronze in Athens struck a powerful chord.

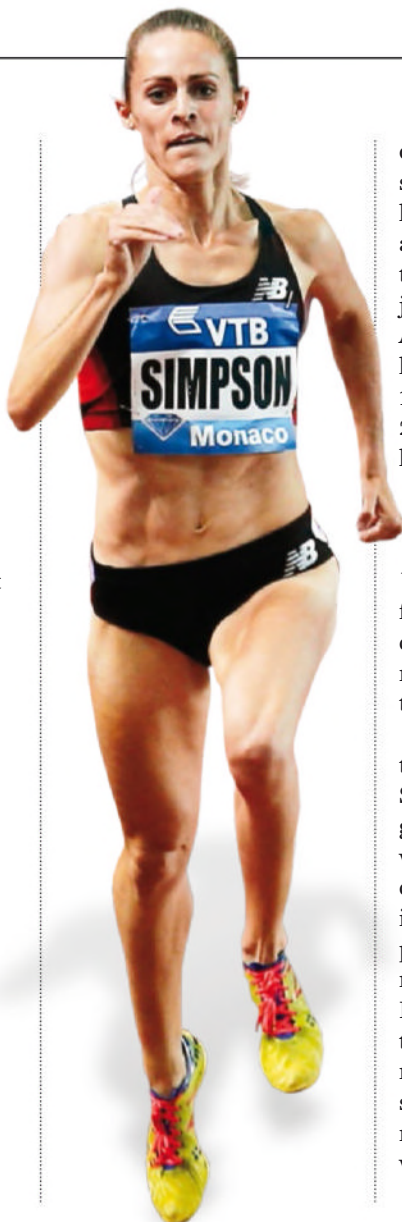
"It was inspiring to see [an American woman] medal at the Olympics," Simpson says. "It was a poignant moment for a lot of high school distance women my age."

Simpson would make her first Olympic team four years later in the steeplechase. At those

Beijing Games she roomed with Shalane Flanagan, a former star at North Carolina who earned a bronze in the 10,000 meters. "I saw Shalane as a very recent graduate from college, and I was in college," Simpson says. "I thought, If this woman could do it, I could do it."

In the seven years since, Simpson, 28, has indeed done it, surging to the front of an increasingly strong field of American women distance runners. In 2009 she broke four minutes, a benchmark for elite status, in the 1,500 for the first time, and in '11 she won the world championship at that distance. She followed that up with a silver at the '13 worlds, and last season at a Diamond League meet she set a new personal best of 3:57.22, .10 of a second off Mary Slaney's 32-year-old U.S. record. Simpson finished the season ranked No. 1 in the world.

"When one person does something it can really



open the floodgates," says Simpson, who is hardly alone in making a name for herself on the track. This season she is just one of a record eight American women who have run under 4:05 for the 1,500. In the steeplechase 24-year-old Emma Coburn has emerged as a medal contender, while in the 800 the depth is so great that Lauren Wallace failed to qualify for the final at June's U.S. championships despite running the world-class time of 2:00.48.

Even among all those talented competitors, Simpson stands out. Her goals this season include winning the world championship in August in Beijing and, at some point, making another run at Slaney's record. "If I'm in a situation where the race is going well, that record can really come," says Simpson. "I feel more ready for it now than I was last year."

—Christopher Chavez

EDGE

In the
Running

With the world track and field championships set for Aug. 22-29 and the Olympics barely a year away, several other U.S. women are making strides on the international scene.

—Richard O'Brien

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/edge



Emma Coburn, 24

Another Colorado grad and 2012 Olympian, Coburn is the reigning U.S. steeplechase champ. World-ranked No. 3 in '14, she's a medal favorite for Beijing.



Molly Huddle, 30

The Notre Dame alum holds the U.S. record at 5,000 meters and stepped up to the 10,000 this season. She beat Flanagan to win the U.S. title on June 25, securing a world championship berth.



Ajeé Wilson, 21

The Neptune, N.J., 800-meter specialist won the 2012 world junior championships. Her PR of 1:57.67 at a Diamond League event was fastest in the world in '14.

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3/15



A PERIODIC LOOK
AT SOME OF
THE MOST
INTRIGUING
RISING STARS

BIG BOARD

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Vital Signs

Focus on the little things, and you just might see a Super Bowl winner in Raiders QB Derek Carr

BY PHIL TAYLOR

STAR quarterbacks aren't born so much as they emerge. It is a gradual process in most cases, a journey of countless small steps. Derek Carr, the Raiders' second-year QB, remembers that one of his first significant steps came last season in Oakland's final exhibition game, against the Seahawks. Carr took his five-step drop and saw that his primary receiver, Denarius Moore, wasn't open. He looked at his secondary target, Andre Holmes—covered. So he

quickly turned to his third option, Latavius Murray, and completed a pass downfield just as he took a shot to the sternum.

Carr doesn't recall who hit him, but he remembers popping up to his feet faster than the tackler did. It was in that moment that he knew something had changed for him, but more importantly, for his teammates. "I think the guys said, Maybe this guy's got what it takes," Carr recalls. "It just kept growing, in little moments like that. My confidence



12

Interceptions in 2014, lowest among the 12 QBs in NFL history who have attempted at least 450 passes in their rookie year.

+

For an exclusive video feature on Derek Carr, or to watch any of the Rising Stars series presented by Symetra, go to SI.com/risingstars

grew and their trust grew. It's small things that most people don't notice that build a team."

They can also build a star, a description that Carr may grow into soon. He has already covered more ground than anyone expected as a second-round pick from Fresno State. The idea coming into camp was that veteran Matt Schaub would be the starter, and that Carr would spend most (if not all) of the season on the sideline, watching, learning and waiting. But Carr just kept doing things right in practice, stringing together those little moments in preseason games, and it was enough to change the Raiders' plans. Dennis Allen, the coach at the time, made Carr the starter in the opener against the Jets, and he never

relinquished the job.

The stats told part of the story: a .518 completion rate, 21 TDs, 12 INTs. But some of the most encouraging aspects of Carr's season were harder to quantify. In Week 5, against the Chargers, for instance, he was shaken up on one play and the Raiders' coaching staff wanted to give him a blow—but Carr resisted. "The coaches were yelling to come out, but I had thrown a pick to [corner Jason Verrett] on the series before, and I hadn't had a chance to throw at him again," he says. "Coach called a run play, but I checked to a pass so I could get a completion on the guy, or I wouldn't have been able to sleep that night."

Carr also has a certain maturity that keeps his abundant self-confidence from turning into cockiness. "He's old beyond his years," says new Raiders coach Jack Del Rio. "He knows he can handle things at this level. Even second-year players have a little deer-in-the-headlights look. Not him."

That comfort comes in large part from Carr's brother David, the No. 1 pick in the 2002 draft, who has uploaded much of his quarterbacking knowledge into Derek's brain in the form of constant quizzes. "When I was in college, he was always like, 'You come to the line and the defense is lined up this way—what's the coverage?'" Derek says. "Now he takes the approach that he's taught me everything he can; he sits back and waits for me to come to him with questions."

Derek has plenty of them—"If I'm facing a defensive coordinator he faced during his career, I'll ask him about blitz tendencies, things like that," he says. But more often Derek simply benefits from having a brother who can say, "I know how you feel," and mean it. "I told him after one game I was so sore I felt like I could barely walk," the younger Carr says. "I didn't take any big hits that game, but David understood."

David never enjoyed the individual success that his younger brother has, largely because of a porous Texans offensive line that allowed him to be sacked 249 times in his first five seasons. But he does have a Super Bowl ring, won as a backup with the Giants in 2012, that Derek covets.

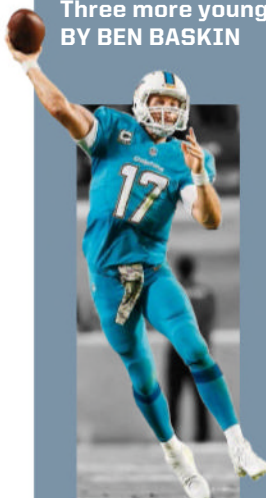
"That's more important than any label," Derek says. "Star is really just a label, and I could never apply that to myself. Do I want to be one of the best? Yes. If I do that and it leads to someone wanting to put that label on me, great. Because that will mean my team is winning."

Carr sees signs that the Raiders are on the right track, beginning with Del Rio. "In addition to the effect he's going to have on the field, there's new paint on the facility," Carr says. "The whole parking lot is clean—no trash. He wants everything to look first-class. No detail is too small."

The journey to a Super Bowl, like the one to stardom, begins with small steps. □

GET YOUR PASS IN GEAR

Three more young QBs who'll thrive in 2015
BY BEN BASKIN



Ryan Tannehill DOLPHINS

His 23-25 record over three seasons belies his talent: He threw for 4,000-plus yards with a 66.4% completion rate in 2014—and he did that with the youngest WRs in the league (average age: 23.6). Add in a year of familiarity with Bill Lazor's three-wide, short-route offense, and you can expect a nice leap from this 26-year-old.



Teddy Bridgewater VIKINGS

At the end of his rookie campaign Bridgewater showed the talent that made him a first-round pick. In weeks 13 through 17 he threw for 246 yards per game, tossed eight TDs and completed 72.1% of his passes, boosting the Vikings' scoring by a touchdown per game. Throw RB Adrian Peterson and WR Mike Wallace into the mix, and this 22-year-old should be very efficient this year.



Blake Bortles JAGUARS

Jacksonville planned to sit Bortles, 22, in 2014 because he had some "development to do," as GM Dave Caldwell put it. But the Jags threw their rookie into the fire anyway behind the NFL's worst line, and the results were mixed. The team bolstered that protection this off-season, and the addition of TE Julius Thomas should help improve Bortles's NFL-worst 3.2 QBR in the red zone.



TRIBUTE

Robby Santiago 1987-2015

SI Now line producer Robby Santiago, 27, fell ill and died of undetermined causes on Friday, July 3. Here, SI Now host Maggie Gray remembers a man she calls “the heart and soul of our show.”

■ Earlier this year we were without a showrunner, and Robby temporarily stepped up to fill the role though he'd never done it before. He worked hard—and then he worked harder. He was a constant. He was creative. He was our safety net. Robby had an unforgettable laugh, a high-pitched chuckle with a dash of Krusty the Clown. His laugh was so powerful, I could hear it through the soundproof glass in our studio. It was the most encouraging sound because he couldn't fake it. If you got one of Robby's laughs, it was like a green light. You knew it was a good show. We'll miss that laugh.



Brianna Pinto | Durham, N.C. | Soccer

Brianna, an attacking midfielder at Jordan High, scored 24 goals and had eight assists as a freshman to lead the Falcons [14-4-1] to the Class 4A tournament. In the U-17 NTC Women's Invitational final in February she scored once to help the U.S. beat Japan 3-1. The state's Gatorade player of the year, Brianna has committed to North Carolina.



Michael Norman | Murrieta, Calif. | Track and Field

Michael, a rising senior at Vista Murrieta High, set California records in the 200 meters [20.30] and the 400 [45.19] at the state meet while leading the Broncos to the Southern Section Division 1 title. Michael, whose time in the 400 remains the best in the nation this season, also won the Adidas Grand Prix Dream 100 race in June, with a 10.36.



Hannah Zhao | Del Mar, Calif. | Tennis

Hannah, a rising sophomore at Torrey Pines High, swept teammate Kelsey Chen to win the San Diego Section singles championship and lift the Falcons to their 25th straight section title. Ranked 22nd in the U.S. among girls 16 and under, Hannah won two national U-16 tournaments this spring and reached the national Easter Bowl round of 16.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Jack Massei | Cary, N.C. | Golf

Jack, a rising sophomore at Green Hope High, shot a low score of 68 in the qualifying round of the state junior boys' championship. He then won six matches in three days at The Country Club of Salisbury. In April, Jack helped Green Hope win the Southwest Wake Athletic Conference title and was named first team all conference.



Lucy Cheadle | Seattle | Track and Field

Cheadle, as a senior at Division III Washington University in St. Louis, won a third national title with a repeat victory in the outdoor 3,000 steeplechase [10:25.32]. In March she won the indoor 5,000 meters. A chemical engineering major who graduated with a 3.80 GPA, she was named track's D-III Academic All-America of the Year.



Gideon Oji | Imane-in-Koji, Nigeria | Competitive Eating

Oji, a 6'9" senior and former center for Division II Clayton State in Morrow, Ga., ate 16 hot dogs to win a Nathan's Famous Hot Dog Eating Contest qualifier in Charlotte; at the Coney Island main event he downed 19 to tie for 13th out of 16 competitors. Gideon, who averaged one point in 2014-15, was the only college athlete at the Major League Eating event.

Nominate Now ▼



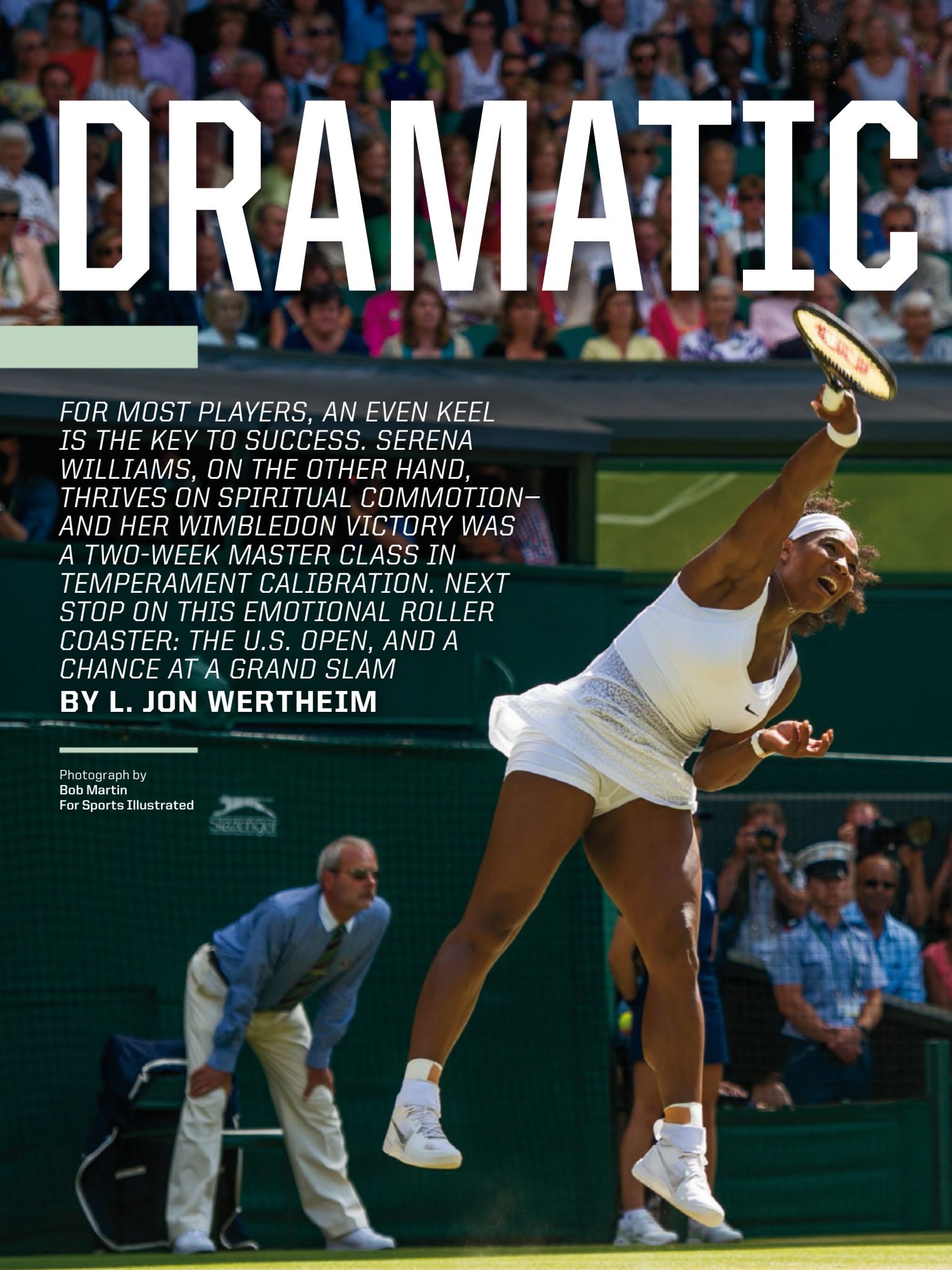
AT 1, I INTRODUCED MYSELF TO THE WORLD
AT 2, 3, 4 AND 5, I HAD RUN THEM ALL
AT 6, THE WARM-UP WAS OVER
AT 13, I WENT AWAY
AT 14, I WAS BACK
AT 15, I WAS GETTING THE HANG OF IT
AT 16, I WAS STARTING TO LIKE IT
AT 18, 19, 20, I BEGAN TO REALIZE
THINGS START TO GET INTERESTING AT 21



JUST DO IT

NIKE.COM/NIKECOURT

DRAMATIC

A full-page photograph of tennis player Serena Williams in the middle of a powerful serve. She is captured mid-air, leaning back with her right arm extended high, holding a tennis racket. She is wearing a white athletic outfit consisting of a tank top and a skirt, with white socks and white sneakers. Her expression is one of intense focus and effort. In the background, a large crowd of spectators is visible in the stands, and a line judge in a light blue shirt and white trousers is crouched on the grass court, watching the play. The scene is set on a green grass tennis court under bright daylight.

FOR MOST PLAYERS, AN EVEN KEEL IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS. SERENA WILLIAMS, ON THE OTHER HAND, THRIVES ON SPIRITUAL COMMOTION—AND HER WIMBLEDON VICTORY WAS A TWO-WEEK MASTER CLASS IN TEMPERAMENT CALIBRATION. NEXT STOP ON THIS EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER: THE U.S. OPEN, AND A CHANCE AT A GRAND SLAM

BY L. JON WERTHEIM

Photograph by
Bob Martin
For Sports Illustrated



EFFECT

TAKE THAT

As usual, Williams mowed down opponents with a ruthless power game: Her serve was clocked as high as 125 mph and produced 80 aces, most in the women's bracket.



IBM



124 mph

IT'S THE story that keeps on giving. The reality show that's perpetually renewed. The Worldwide Domination Tour that rolls on, grossing millions, enthraling fans, making a mockery of history and resisting hyperbole. You'll have to check the back of the souvenir T-shirt for the full slate of dates, but recent triumphant stops include New York City, Melbourne, Paris and last weekend in London.

Hoovering up these tennis titles, though, affords Serena Williams little recreational time. With a few weeks off, Williams can now, as she puts it, "get in some me time." She can spend time with her Yorkie, Chip; renew acquaintances; and dispose of some of that disposable

winning the Wimbledon singles title for the sixth time and claiming the 21st major title of her career, Serena played her characteristically excellent, unanswerably powerful tennis. But the real undergird of her success was finding the right algorithms and balancing her palette of emotions.

Some athletes strive for calm and simplicity and routine, a paring of the disruptions (see: Novak Djokovic). That's not how Serena rolls. For all that her parents, Richard and Oracene, got right when they began authoring the *Most Unlikely Sports Story Ever Told*, they sure whiffed on the names. Their youngest daughter is many things, but *serene* ain't one of them. "It's almost like she needs that drama," said 18-time Grand Slam champion Martina Navratilova, "to be fully engaged."

In the rare moments and intervals that Serena hasn't succeeded on the court since her breakthrough at the



When Serena appealed for quiet and the crowd only booed louder, she wagged a finger, cut everyone a look and warned, "Don't try me!"

income—including the \$5 million she's earned over the last five weeks alone. She also looks forward to watching *Inside Out*, "an awesome movie," says her older sister, Isha Price.

Price is right. The film has already grossed more than \$300 million worldwide, so a spoiler alert is probably unnecessary. But *Inside Out* makes an intriguing point about an abstract concept, made digestible by the Pixar animation. We all have this flow of emotions inside our interior command centers—joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust—and the film suggests that these various emotions don't snuff each other out so much as they work in concert to create fully formed individuals.

It's a perfect distillation of Serena's astonishing success in 2015, an explanation for why, having won the Serena Slam (four straight majors) for the second time in her career, she's one piece away from owning the ultimate box set in sports, tennis's Grand Slam. In

U.S. Open in (*gulp*) 1999, it hasn't been because of broken forehands or a dodgy serve. It's because of meltdowns and breakdowns. The drama wins.

But it hasn't lately. She's handled the drama and, with it, the occasions. And maybe more than in any tournament she's played, this Wimbledon required meticulous adjustments of temperament, each day demanding a different calibration. First, there was the pre-tournament hype. When Serena won the French Open last month—crying on the court, suffering from the flu, requiring three sets in five of her seven matches—it put her halfway to the Grand Slam. She handled the attendant pressure by refusing to talk about it or take any questions. "Nope," she told a slightly aghast BBC host at one point, playfully putting her hands over her ears. "Not going there."

Once a tournament starts, Serena can be vulnerable early, before the trophy is in sight and her focus becomes unswerving. There's often a storm before

COURT GESTURES

The inability of Muguruza (top, far court) to handle Williams's blazing returns gave Serena a sixth victory walk at Wimbledon.

the calm—of her last four losses in majors, each has occurred in the middle rounds. At Wimbledon her big scare came in round 3 when she faced then 59th-ranked Heather Watson, a plucky 23-year-old Brit based in Bradenton, Fla.

When Watson pushed the match to a third set, the Centre Court crowd was united in its vocal backing of the homegrown underdog. When she fanned flames with one of those everyone-on-your-feet gestures, it displeased Serena in the extreme. When Serena appealed for quiet and the crowd only booed louder, she wagged a finger, cut

everyone a look and warned, “Don’t try me!” Serena’s fury, though, melded with focus. A game from losing in a titanic upset, Serena steadied and closed, 6–2, 4–6, 7–5. *Get off my lawn, kid!*

Barely off the court, she was still upset by the experience, what she perceived as shabby treatment at the hands of both the crowd and the opponent. She was calmed by older sister Venus . . . who also happened to be her next opponent in a match that would require an altogether different blend of emotions.

A**FTER 26** iterations, the sports public has grown accustomed to Williams-Williams matches, perhaps taking these intra-family affairs for granted. We neglect to consider how remarkable it is that the two players in the draw with the most major titles share the same DNA and once shared a bedroom; that now—with a combined age approaching 70—they

are still going strong. Venus and Serena have, understandably, never warmed to these matches. They are awkward, fraught events, with the necessary elimination of a sibling. Still, this one would be especially delicate. Either Venus would win, ending her sister’s run at history, or Serena would win, ending the best chance that Venus, age 35, might ever have of winning one last major title.

In the end Serena didn’t merely beat Venus. She played one of her strongest matches in weeks, balancing empathy and sororal love with a sense of mission and professional responsibility. It was all done with a certain sucks-that-it-has-to-go-down-like-this resignation—and lacking any of the fist-pumping intensity and angry monologues at herself. But damn if even her big sister was going to thwart her Grand Slam campaign.

In the quarterfinals Serena required still another blend, one that included the fearlessness and clutch play that

SERENA WILLIAMS

has come to characterize her career. Her opponent, 25-year-old Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, was not just a former No. 1 and two-time Australian Open champion, but she had also come within a few points of beating Serena in two previous matches this year. For an additional subplot, Azarenka is now working with Sascha Bajin, Serena’s former longtime hitting partner and confidant, who is intimately familiar with her playing patterns and, perhaps above all, emotional makeup.

Azarenka played a near-perfect first set, winning 6–3. If the Centre Court crowd was again excited and primed to witness an upset, oddsmakers knew better. Sure enough, Serena stormed back with a fireworks display of explosive hitting. With Grammy-winning rapper Drake in her box yelling, unaccountably, “Eat your food, girl,” Serena dialed in her strokes and squeezed off a round of aces, finishing her 17th straight third-set win. “We just saw why she is No. 1,” Azarenka said in summary.

While Serena is friendly with Azarenka, she is full of animus for world No. 2 Maria Sharapova. Their longstanding chill officially became frost in 2013 when Sharapova publicly accused Serena of having a romantic relationship with Williams’s married coach, Patrick Mouratoglou. For Serena, seeing Sharapova across the net triggers a singular set of emotions. The inevitable result: a summoning of her best, most ruthless tennis. Serena blitzed Sharapova yet again, pushing her career record in major semifinals to a ridiculous 25–3. And it pushed her head-to-head record (foot-to-backside record?) against Sharapova to 18–2.



SERENA WILLIAMS

Saturday's final presented still another emotional calibration. Serena was the heavy favorite against 21-year-old Garbiñe Muguruza, a hard-hitting Spaniard who was a five-year-old in Barcelona when Serena won her first major. Seeded 20th and playing in her first major final, Muguruza could either be paralyzed by the occasion or face it with a blissful nothing-to-lose freedom. Prepared for either scenario, Serena calmed herself when she took the court by singing the *Flashdance* theme song to herself.

After a shaky start, Serena took her passion and made it happen, winning nine of the next 10 games. Though never at her best, Serena did what was necessary to avoid the upset, winning 6-4, 6-4. Finally, the mix of emotions could include elation. Finally, she could address this quest for the Grand Slam. "One more to go," she told her entourage with a wink. Then, noticing she'd been overheard, she added, "But I try to live in the moment, and I'm still very much here."

I F SERENA managed drama, Djokovic, the defending men's champ, sought to avoid it. He spent select mornings during the tournament at a Thai Buddhist shrine near The All England Club in a quest for tranquility. "I needed to find the right path," he said. "People don't realize how mental a sport this is."

In an era that demands flash and GIF-worthy flourishes, Djokovic is fighting an uphill battle with the public. The Djoker is more technician than genius; a craftsman, not a magician. Apart from a peerless return of serve, his great strength is

an absence of weakness. While it's not telegenic, it's awfully effective.

Djokovic has also shown tremendous powers of recovery. At the French Open last month he was a match away from winning the only major that has eluded him and—already entrenched atop the rankings—distancing himself even further from his colleagues. He lost in four sets in the final to Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka and later admitted, "I didn't know how I would bounce back or how long it would take."

Answers: 1) Well. 2) Not long. Djokovic blazed through the first week of Wimbledon without dropping a set. In the fourth round, however, he was down two sets to Kevin Anderson, a 29-year-old hard-serving South African. With the calm and precision of a Zen archer, Djokovic started playing as though missing weren't even an option. He survived the match and returned to the business of winning with efficiently unspectacular tennis.

This put him at odds with his opponent in the final. Since Roger Federer won his first major title there in 2003 (he now has seven Wimbledon trophies), the courts at The All England Club have always agreed with him. Some of it's pragmatic: the low bounce on grass that's ideal for his zinging one-handed backhand; the lawn's rewarding of his graceful movement. But there's also the feel-good factor. All that tradition and decorum and civility mirrors his Old World belief system. (One example among many: Federer resents the trend of players' taking the court wearing headphones.) He warmed to the simplicity that comes with renting a home in a village near the court, not staying at a hotel in an urban center. "Maybe you call it a sense of place," he says.

Whether it's causation or correlation, Wimbledon has also been the site of his best tennis. Federer, like Serena, turns 34 soon, and by the time he beat Andy Murray in the semifinals, with a dizzy-

ingly high level of play, it appeared the fates had written the script. Djokovic, though, proved again that function can trump form. Pressuring Federer with his precise returns, he won the first set. In the second, he failed to convert seven set points and Federer leveled the match, to the crowd's delight. Ten minutes later, though, Djokovic broke Federer—again, those powers of quick recovery—and closed out the match 7-6, 6-7, 6-4, 6-3. Djokovic has now won nine majors, passing players with names like Agassi, Connors, Lendl and Ken Rosewall. "Djokovic is 28 and entering



BUST A MOVE

Williams and Djokovic brought the house down with their winners' dance at the Champions' Dinner.

his prime," said seven-time Grand Slam champ John McEnroe. "Who knows? When it's all done, maybe *he* could go down as the best ever."

Serena is already credentialed with that distinction on the women's side. The summer started with a racehorse headed to Long Island, attempting to make history at the Belmont. It will close with a tennis player heading a few miles away, to the U.S. Open, with designs of accomplishing her sport's equivalent of the Triple Crown. Watch her while you still can—this champion, this American treasure, this real American Pharaoh. □

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WITH ARMS
WIDE OPEN

Lloyd (10) got a hug from Holiday and a shower of love from the pro-U.S. crowd after her second goal in the final, a deflected flick-in off a free kick.

Photograph by
Maddie Meyer/FIFA/
Getty Images



Aye, Carli!



• WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

BY GRANT WAHL

Now that she's helped the U.S. capture its third Women's World Cup trophy, reflect on this: If not for some tough love from an old-school coach 12 years ago, **Carli Lloyd** never would have dominated in Vancouver—or even attempted that marvel of a goal

T

HE SEEDS for the greatest goal in U.S. soccer history were planted 12 years ago on an otherwise deserted field in Lumberton, N.J. Carli Lloyd and James Galanis, the Jersey Girl and her Aussie coach, began working together in 2003, not long after Lloyd was cut from

the U.S. under-21 team. Dejected and out of shape, she was about to quit the sport for good. But with Galanis she rekindled her love for soccer, and during their two-a-day workouts he began setting up training sticks around the penalty spot, mimicking a goalkeeper. Then he would ask Lloyd to move back to the center circle and take aim at the goal, bouncing 50-yard shots around his faux keeper and into the net.

Lloyd was skeptical: "I'm thinking, Who is going to shoot from midfield?"

Over the years, as Lloyd ascended to the senior national team and became one of its most productive central midfielders, she tried to score from the halfway line on a few occasions. "She missed every time," says Galanis. "A couple of times it went just wide, and one time she

completely shanked it. But [that shot] was always part of her arsenal. It was just a matter of picking the right moment to unleash it."

Like, say, in a World Cup final?

On July 5 at Vancouver's BC Place, Lloyd pounced on a Japanese turnover near midfield, evaded a tackle and looked up to see goalkeeper Ayumi Kaihori off her line. In an instant, Lloyd was back on that dimly lit field in south Jersey, back in a place where there was no sold-out 53,000-strong crowd—and most certainly no U.S. television audience of 26.7 million, the largest ever for a soccer game, male or female. With her right foot Lloyd launched an angry parabola downfield, and for a moment everything was in slow motion: the arc of the ball, Kaihori's stumbling retreat and then the goalkeeper's final desperate lunge as she tipped the ball off her post and into the net.

Bedlam.

Wildfires in the region had already released the power of one natural phenomenon that day, darkening the sky, leaving the open-topped stadium smelling like a campfire. And now another one—the deafening roar of the pro-American crowd—threatened to send the building into orbit. The U.S.

HOPE SOLO
GOALKEEPER

LORI CHALUPNY
DEFENDER

SYDNEY LEROUX
FORWARD

CARLI LLOYD
MIDFIELDER

ALYSSA NAEHER
GOALKEEPER

TOBIN HEATH
MIDFIELDER





JUNE 8 / WINNIPEG (Group play)
USA 3, AUSTRALIA 1

Rapinoe bangs in a pair of goals in the opener.

JUNE 12 / WINNIPEG (Group play)
USA 0, SWEDEN 0

Solo's 85th shutout staves off an upset.

JUNE 16 / VANCOUVER (Group play)
USA 1, NIGERIA 0

Wambach's volleyed corner proves decisive.

had scored four goals in the first 16 minutes of the World Cup final. Three had come from Lloyd, the last this wonderstrike from the halfway line. It was nothing less than the most remarkable quarter hour in the history of American soccer. Defending champion Japan was done, the victim of a first-round KO, and the U.S. would go on to win its record third Women's World Cup title (and first since 1999) in a 5–2 victory for the ages that ended with Lloyd lifting the Golden Ball trophy.

Watching the game while on vacation with his family in Greece, Galanis (who also helped defender Julie Johnston get to the next level by working with her last winter) pogo-sticked around his hotel

room in the wee hours of the morning. “It wasn’t a fluke,” he says of Lloyd’s moonshot. “It’s something we’ve worked on. She had the courage to do it.”

Two days later, in a 10th-floor aerie above downtown Los Angeles, Lloyd herself could finally reflect. She had just celebrated with her 22 teammates—and 10,000 U.S. fans—at a rally shown live on national television. Three days after that, the team would be in New York City for a ticker-tape parade down the Canyon of Heroes in front of tens of thousands more admirers. President Obama would name-check Lloyd on Twitter and ask her over the phone what she’d eaten for breakfast the day of the final. Amid all this, Lloyd shook her head and marveled at the moment, to say nothing of The Moment. “Never did I think I would score a goal from midfield in a World Cup final,” she said. “But instincts kicked in. From practicing it, it happened.”

LAUREN HOLIDAY
MIDFIELDER

MORGAN BRIAN
MIDFIELDER

WHITNEY ENGEN
DEFENDER

CHRISTEN PRESS
FORWARD

SHANNON BOXX
MIDFIELDER

ASHLYN HARRIS
GOALKEEPER



MORE THAN any World Cup in recent memory, this year's was a reminder that for any champion the trajectory of a tournament is rarely a straight line of global domination. The Americans saved their best for their toughest two opponents, Germany (in a 2-0 semifinal win) and Japan. During the group stage, however, the team was a shadow of its usual self in the attack. Tasked with defensive duties, Lloyd and her central midfield partner, Lauren Holiday, failed to generate offense, and the top-seeded U.S. hardly looked like a juggernaut.

"I was *not* in a good place the first three games," says Lloyd, 33, who had scored the winning goals in the 2008 and '12 Olympic gold medal games. "You come into a tournament like this, and you expect you're going to be firing on all cylinders all the time. And I'm my own worst critic. If I underperform, I'm not happy. I think, overall, we were supersolid defensively—even me. But I just wasn't doing what comes naturally, what I can do to have an impact."

After the last group-stage game, a tepid 1-0 victory over Nigeria, Lloyd met privately with coach Jill Ellis. The message from above was simple: *Don't stress. We're going to get you going.* Lloyd enjoyed a bit more attacking freedom in the next game, a 2-0 win over Colombia in the Round of 16, and she says that converting a late penalty kick, her first goal of the tournament, helped flip a switch inside. With Holiday serving a yellow-card suspension in the quarterfinals, Ellis inserted Morgan Brian as a pure defensive midfielder, allowing Lloyd to wreak havoc in a

"If I call you and say, 'I'll meet you at the field in half an hour,' don't tell me, 'Sorry, Coach, I'm at a party,' " Galanis said to Lloyd. "Turn to your friends and say, 'Sorry, guys, I have to leave.' "

more advanced position. After scoring zero goals in the first three games, Lloyd had six in the last four. "It's just unbelievable," Lloyd says. "The way it was starting out for me, I didn't think it would end up like this. I really didn't."

"They weren't going to win it by playing Carli the way they played her the first three games," says Galanis. "That tweak—putting Carli higher—is what won them the World Cup. That's the reality."

ABBY WAMBACH
FORWARD

ALI KRIEGER
DEFENDER

HEATHER O'REILLY
MIDFIELDER

MEGHAN KLINGENBERG
DEFENDER

JULIE JOHNSTON
DEFENDER

ALEX MORGAN
FORWARD





JUNE 22 / EDMONTON (Round of 16)
USA 2, COLOMBIA 0

Morgan scores and draws a penalty kick.



JUNE 26 / OTTAWA (Quarterfinals)
USA 1, CHINA 0

Pairing Lloyd (10) with Brian (14) pays off.



JUNE 30 / MONTREAL (Semifinals)
USA 2, GERMANY 0

O'Hara (5) finalizes it: on to Vancouver.

In the days after the tournament, Lloyd realized her life had forever changed. She dined with relatives at an L.A. restaurant, where strangers cheered and the check magically disappeared. She signed an endorsement deal with Visa (and will undoubtedly ink several more). But all along, Lloyd couldn't help but think back to the days in 2003 when she decided she was done with soccer and began planning for life after graduation from Rutgers—maybe a desk job in an office somewhere. One day her father, Steve, asked her to meet with Galanis, a former professional player from Melbourne who'd moved to New Jersey in 1997.

"My daughter needs you," Galanis remembers hearing from Steve Lloyd.

As Carli recalls, "When my dad came to me, he said, 'Look, I know you're upset; you want to hang your cleats up. But I think this guy is legit. Just do an evaluation with him, and if you still want to quit, you can. But just give it one more shot.'"

When Galanis put Lloyd through an hourlong skills test, he says, he saw a player with advanced technique and a craftiness that had been developed from a young age in Delran, where Lloyd played with boys on a field named after U.S. Hall of Famer Peter Vermes. But she was exhausted after 15 minutes, and in a physical test the next day, Galanis says, Lloyd "was so unfit, it was pitiful." When he asked her what she wanted to achieve, she told him her goal was to play for the senior national team. And so he laid out what had to happen. One, her fitness had to become world-class. Two, she had to *force* her coaches to put her into the team; she had to quit making excuses. And three, she had

MEGAN RAPINOE
MIDFIELDER

CHRISTIE RAMPONE
DEFENDER

BECKY SAUERBRUNN
DEFENDER

KELLEY O'HARA
DEFENDER

AMY RODRIGUEZ
FORWARD

JILL ELLIS
COACH





to make soccer the No. 1 priority in her life.

“Forget about friends, forget about family, forget about boyfriends,” Galanis told her. “If this isn’t No. 1, let’s just walk off the field right now. What I’m saying to you, Carli, is that at 10 o’clock on a Saturday night, if I call you and say, ‘I’ll meet you at the field in half an hour,’ and you’re at a party with your friends, don’t tell me, ‘Sorry, Coach, I’m at a party.’ You’ll turn to your friends and say, ‘Sorry, guys, I have to leave; I’m going to training.’ Do you understand the commitment here?”

Lloyd answered yes, thus beginning a quasi-religious routine that continues to this day. When Lloyd is with her club team, the NWSL’s Houston Dash, Galanis sends her extra fitness and skill work. And during the off-season, from September to February, the two train in New Jersey twice a day, seven days a week, including on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. The message sent by training on holidays is a psychological one: They know the competition isn’t. It’s the same type of message that Lloyd communicated to her friends, family and fiancé, Brian Hollins, by asking them *not* to come to this World Cup, the better for her to focus entirely on her job.

Is Lloyd hard-core? You bet she is. “I think every single person thinks I’m a freak, but I think it’s cool,” she says with a laugh. “Why would I want to be like everybody else?”

JULY 5 / **VANCOUVER [Final]**
USA 5, JAPAN 2

It’s a cakewalk to a record third WWC trophy.



LONG HAUL
 After a bitter loss to Japan in the 2011 final, Lloyd’s audacious 54-yarder laid Kaihori low and had the U.S. buzzing around its captain.



THE JERSEY GIRL and the Aussie coach have a tradition. Before every major tournament, Galanis writes Lloyd an email. In the lead-up to this World Cup he explained that in 2007 and ’08 he had to trick her into thinking she was fit because even then she wasn’t truly a 90-minute player. Now, he wrote, “it’s the total opposite. You’re one of the fittest players on the planet.”

“Fitness, defending, the mental stuff—those were all weaknesses of mine,” says Lloyd. “And I turned those

A SOARING SYMPHONY

The Breitling Jet Team arrives in the U.S. for its first North American tour.



PHOTO: ANDY WOLFE

The Breitling Jet Team, the world's largest full-time civilian aerobatic squad, is a global phenomenon. The crew of pilots, maintenance staff, fighter jets and support planes is based in Dijon, France, but has entertained audiences with daring acrobatic displays in 38 different countries. The matching Czech-made L-39C Albatros jets have roared past the massive Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur at close range and soared in formation over the Great Wall of China.

But this summer these highly trained pilots will streak across a brand-new sky, one that stretches from sea to shining sea, on the Breitling Jet Team's first-ever United States tour.

In 2002 the independent Swiss watch brand Breitling contacted French pilot Jacques Boethelin to set up his own aerobatic team, which he has been leading ever since. The synergy between the precision and accuracy of a Breitling timepiece and the Jet Team was a natural fit, especially for a company known as the official partner of aviation for nearly a century.

Boethelin recruited and trained a group of six other pilots who work together, not unlike a symphony orchestra. "When you play the music, it has to be for the spectators and not for highlighting a certain violin, or the second tuba or something like that," he says. "The purpose is to get a global perception of the display."

The aerial orchestra is in full swing, delighting audiences from Florida to Seattle to British Columbia. The tour kicked off in Lakeland, Fla., at the Sun 'n Fun airshow. The team then headed to New York City in early June for an appearance in Times Square, where the pilots were joined by professional golfers Morgan Hoffman and Suzann Pettersen, plus sports radio personalities Boomer Esiason and Craig Carton.

For years Boethelin dreamed of captaining his team in the United States, so he was thrilled to finally achieve his goal. "A few years ago," Boethelin says, "I was visiting the Statue of Liberty with my wife and daughter, and I said, 'Wow—one day I dream of having my jets fly around this.' And when I got to do it, I kept saying, 'Is this really true? Are we really here?'"

Cruising along in formation, the team looked right at home against the city's majestic skyline.

The aerial orchestra is in full swing, delighting audiences from Florida to Seattle to British Columbia.



PHOTO: 929MEDIA

For additional Breitling Jet Team tour dates, visit
breitling-jet-team.com


BREITLING
1884

into strengths." Old-fashioned coaching tricks yielded a World Cup hat trick.

Twelve years ago, when Lloyd was about to quit soccer, she listened as Galanis told her about Michael Jordan and Muhammad Ali and Bruce Lee, who all shared a common quality: They trained when nobody was watching. And so she did the same. In many ways, it was symbolic of Lloyd's national-team career before this breakout. True, she had scored some big goals over the years, but she was never the main attraction, never the odds-on favorite to become the World Player of the Year. All that changed over a few days in Canada, only now there were *millions* of onlookers.

"I have flown under the radar for a while with U.S. Soccer," Lloyd said

in L.A. last week. "I'm not really put out front and center. I don't really worry about doing my hair and makeup. I just let my play do the talking. And I think it's really cool that I've put my head down all these years and have continued to work day in and day out. And now? To get to this point, because of all that, not because I know somebody or because I'm posing for magazines? It's because of what I've done on the field."

She earned it. Her team earned it. And after waiting 16 long years, America has another World Cup champion. □

★ **WHAT NOW** for women's soccer? Well, if you just became a fan, it's easy to find your favorite players from the U.S. (and from their competition in other countries; *Hello, Christine Sinclair!*) in the nine-team National Women's Soccer League, which continues play through September and saw rising ticket sales last week as part of a post-World Cup surge. As one example, the Houston Dash (home to Carli Lloyd, plus fellow U.S. starters Morgan Brian and Meghan Klingenberg) had a team-record crowd of 13,025 for Sunday's 2-1 loss to the Chicago Red Stars (featuring Christen Press, Lori Chalupny, Shannon Boxx and Julie Johnston, last year's NWSL Rookie of the Year).

The NWSL represents the U.S.'s third attempt at a topflight women's league in the last 15 years, and it keeps owners' costs down



Here We Grow

The women's win was a great moment for their sport—but we've been here before. Now can this new energy propel a pro league forward?

by having the U.S. and Canadian soccer federations cover the salaries of their national-team players. The league is in its third season, traditionally a tough one for women's soccer leagues—WUSA went kaput after year three, in 2003; WPS suspended its

fourth season, '12, before petering out later. "Our goal is to grow the game, and I think winning the World Cup is going to help that," says midfielder Lauren Holiday, who's retiring from the U.S. team but plans to play the rest of this season with FC Kansas City. "I

have faith that our fans are going to buy into the NWSL."

Reason *not* to believe: We've heard this before, to no success. **Reason *to* believe:** The NWSL recently announced a new TV deal that will have Fox Sports broadcast six national games, and most of the rest are streamed online, offering critical access and exposure to a growing game. Meanwhile, the U.S. will milk this newfound enthusiasm by playing a 10-game Victory Tour across the country, beginning with an Aug. 16 friendly in Pittsburgh against Costa Rica.

And then? The qualifying tournament for the 2016 Olympics in Brazil (where the U.S. will be aiming for its fourth straight gold medal) takes place in January. For the national team, and for its growing sport: onward. —G.W.

HERE'S TO THE RED, WHITE, AND WEBER BLUE AGAVE.

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Strike Force

MLB

**THE METS' STARTERS
ARE YOUNG AND OLD,**

**SLIM AND ROUND,
SELF-EFFACING AND
SUPREMELY CONFIDENT.
ONE THING THEY HAVE
IN COMMON: THEY
ATTACK THE ZONE LIKE
NO OTHER ROTATION
IN THE GAME**

BY TOM VERDUCCI

Photograph by
Rick Wenner for Sports Illustrated
Photo Illustration by
SI Premedia



MISMATCHED AS a pile of garage sale dinnerware, the starting pitchers for the Mets make for one of the most efficient strike-throwing rotations ever assembled. Like the stage, the mound provides no instructional manual. It invites interpretative behavior. Having arrived four by the draft, one by trade and one by free agency, and ranging in age from 22 to 42, the Flushing Six are masters of the “pitching in a nutshell” philosophy of their pitching coach, Dan Warthen: “Throw strikes when you have to; throw balls when you want to.”

The rotation includes four young guns who rank among the hardest-throwing starters in the majors, but also a soft-tossing mid-career lefthander and a quadragenarian miracle of modern medicine (some of it even legal). There are two broad-shouldered superheroes (the Dark Knight and Thor), and two other members uniquely recognizable by the bulges in their silhouette (one from under the cap, the other from over the belt).

Bartolo Colon, 42; Jon Niese, 28; Jacob deGrom, 27; Matt Harvey, 26;



orce

Steven Matz, 24; and Noah Syndergaard, 22, are to pitching what Strunk and White are to writing. William Strunk Jr. wrote *The Elements of Style* in 1918. E.B. White revised and enlarged it in '59. The volume has long been recognized as the definitive American guide to the craft. "A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts," Strunk wrote.

The Mets' starters treat their pitches with the same purpose as Strunk and White did their words. New York's starting six average 4.18 strikeouts for every walk, a rate that rivals the 2011 Phillies' rotation—which featured Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee, Cole

Hamels and Roy Oswalt—as history's best in that category (4.22 strikeouts per walk).

"The way we've been attacking is pretty incredible," Harvey says. "That shows you how confident we are in our stuff. As young as we are, we know we're talented. I don't see that stat changing at all."

The rotation just got even younger and more talented—briefly. The lefthanded Matz was too good for the Mets to keep in Triple A. "He reminds me of [Clayton] Kershaw," says Warthen, applying the highest possible accolade in the game today. Matz's career strikeout-to-walk rate in the minors (3.14) is even better than what Harvey put up before his 2012 promotion (2.82). Matz debuted on June 28 and pitched two excellent games, allowing New York to use a rolling system of six starters for five spots, a fungible rotation general manager Sandy Alderson calls "six-man light."

SIX SHOOTERS

The Mets are built on the firepower of (left to right) DeGrom, Colon, Harvey, Syndergaard, Niese and Matz.

But last weekend the team announced that Matz had a tear in his left lat muscle and would miss at least three weeks.

The 2011 Phillies won 102 games. These Mets, even with such stalwart starting pitching, struggle to keep their heads above .500. The beauty of their arms is undermined by an unathletic defense without much range, the lack of an experienced catcher, and an offense that ranks 14th in a 15-team league in runs per game. Pitching for the Mets, no matter how well done, can seem like being yoked to Javert's chain gang.

Harvey, for instance, allowed one or no runs in 25 of his first 50 starts, tying a live-ball-era record (since 1920) set by former Mets phenom Dwight Gooden in '84-'85. Gooden went 21-0 in his 25 starts allowing no more than one run. But Harvey won fewer than half of his gems, going 12-3.

Complicating the Mets' task is the gnawing worry behind virtually every pitch in the modern game: How do you keep pitchers healthy, especially the ones who throw so hard? Syndergaard and the now-injured Matz have never pitched a six-month season. Harvey and DeGrom have never thrown more than 178 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings in a season. Matz (May 2010), DeGrom (October '10), Harvey (October '13) and erstwhile starter Zack Wheeler (March 15) all have had Tommy John surgery between ages 19 and 24.

The air in Flushing is charged with unease. Since moving into Citi Field more than six years ago, the Mets have never fielded a winning team, while losing a million paying customers. New York is trying to contend for a postseason spot while protecting its young power pitchers, an awkward balancing act that resembles a circus bear on a ball; the trick is that it is done at all, not that it is done well. Says Alderson, "There's not a science to this. We're not following a formula. It's not just about innings. It's about pitches, the number of starts, a whole host of things. None of that information can you just plug into an algorithm and say, 'This guy will be protected from this injury.' It's a very imprecise effort to manage."

The Mets briefly toyed with a six-man rotation in early June, gave it up, returned to it when Matz arrived, and may continue it when he recovers. They have used every available off day to juggle their starters and get them extra rest. They will use the All-Star break to beg, borrow and steal more time off for their young arms.

In Harvey, DeGrom, Syndergaard and Matz, the Mets are sitting on the greatest cache of young pitching in the game. The curse to such a blessing is that they are trying to win now without turning any of them into the next Dan Warthen.

HEY, WHERE are you?"

Harvey recognized the glaze of worry shellacked on the face of Syndergaard, who had just given up seven runs in his fifth major league start, on June 2.

"Uh, I'm sitting in the dugout in San Diego."

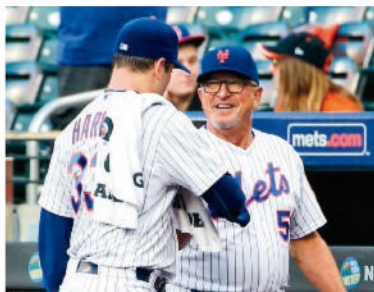
"Yeah, in the big leagues!" Harvey said. "This is where you want to be and where you're going to be. I'll tell you one thing: This is not going to be the last game you give up seven runs. Do you know why that is?"



**Matt
Harvey**

AGE: **26**
ERA: **3.07**
K/BB: **4.19**

**THE METS'
ROTATION IS ON
PACE FOR ONE OF
THE BEST GROUP
K/BB RATIOS EVER.
"THAT SHOWS YOU
HOW CONFIDENT WE
ARE," SAYS HARVEY.**



DAN THE MAN

Warthen (with Harvey, Above) doesn't want his pitchers to be overworked the way he was.

"Why?"

"Because you're going to be here a long time. You have to know that."

Says Harvey, "His face kind of lit up then. I remember I gave up two or three home runs in San Diego. It was my third start. Immediately you get a little bit of doubt. 'Am I going back down? What's going to happen?' I just wanted to let him know that wasn't going to happen, that we were all there behind him."

Eight days later, Harvey gave up seven runs himself. After the game, Colon walked over to Harvey at his locker, smiled, hugged him and said, "You're O.K."

"That's all I needed," Harvey says.

Well, not really. The next day, fighting a four-start slump during which he yielded 20 runs in 25 innings, Harvey met privately with manager Terry Collins and spoke on the phone with his sports psychologist, Don Carman.

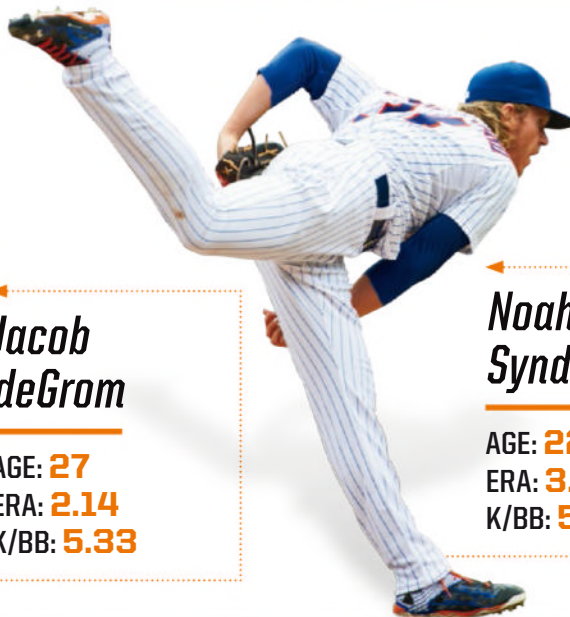
What Harvey concluded was that he had lost the bare-bones attack mode that as a 24-year-old in 2013 had landed him on the SI cover as "The Dark Knight."

"Whether injuries or innings limits or six-



Jacob deGrom

AGE: **27**
ERA: **2.14**
K/BB: **5.33**



Noah Syndergaard

AGE: **22**
ERA: **3.11**
K/BB: **5.14**

*STATS THROUGH JULY 12

man rotations, being away from the game . . . I let that get to me,” Harvey says. “I had to get back to worrying about the next pitch and not outcomes, like, Hey, if I throw seven innings for the next 21 starts, am I going to be done? Those outside distractions got cluttered in my brain.”

Niese and Colon have more experience than Harvey. But there is no doubt who leads this staff. Harvey has a physical presence, especially since he packed on about 30 pounds since slimming to 195 pounds at the end of 2013. He does not so much walk as he stalks, slowly, as if it’s high noon on a dusty Main Street in Dodge City. His bearing announces to the other team that baseball will be played under his rules of engagement on what have become known as Harvey Days—as if the entire day when he pitches is private property.

Says Warthen, “I want this to be Harvey’s team, Harvey’s pitching staff. At times he’s trying to do that, and he overdoes it on the mound—because they follow him. Nobody misses a Harvey pitch. In San Diego, I would never miss a [Barry] Bonds at bat or a [Tony] Gwynn at bat. And they’re never going to miss a Harvey pitch.”

Harvey looks at Syndergaard and sees himself when he was a sophomore at North Carolina, when he bulked up to 260 pounds, wanting to be bigger and better than what he was as a freshman—only to flop. Syndergaard, the son of a Texas horse trainer, is 6’ 6” and 240 pounds, with a tightly muscled bearing that caused teammates last year to tape a picture in his spring training locker of Ivan Drago, the cinematic Soviet boxing rival of Rocky Balboa.

“My goal was to loosen him up a little bit, and I think he has,” Harvey says. “I had that kind of macho man, unstoppable kind of thing going on. Just the way he was walking around . . . he knows he’s big, so bringing him down a little but to loosen him up was the main thing. I think he’s found his place.”

Says Syndergaard, “He always makes fun of me. I’m not a very flexible person. I look robotic. He gives me a hard time about that.”

DeGrom and Harvey, who locker next to one another, have become close friends. DeGrom has a lightness of being that contrasts well with Harvey’s molten intensity. DeGrom is the accidental pitcher, having played middle infield at Stetson University. Before his junior year there, the school placed him on a summer collegiate league team with the idea of having him pitch; he was so unhappy about it he quit the team. The next spring, in 2010, Stetson planned to use him as a shortstop and as a closer. But when few save opportunities arose, he was asked to start. His second start was against Chris Sale of Florida Gulf Coast University, a certain first-round pick. The place was loaded with scouts, who suddenly also were interested in this 6’ 4” 180-pounder with the silky delivery.

The Mets took him in the ninth round in 2010. After six starts in rookie ball, DeGrom needed Tommy John surgery. “That helped me a lot,” he says, “because I had no programs before that. It helped me build a training routine and mechanics and to repeat my arm slot.”

While on rehab, DeGrom learned a changeup from former Cy Young Award winner Johan Santana, who also was rehabbing with the Mets at the time. The organization had no idea what they had. A rival general manager said New York shopped DeGrom after the 2013 season, when he had a 4.51 ERA in the minors. “It actually made you skeptical, like, What do they know about him?” the GM said. (Alderson disputes the account.)

The Mets called him up in May 2014 as a stopgap. He made 22 starts, pitched to a 2.69 ERA, won the NL Rookie of the Year Award and became famous for the most outrageous tresses this side of Broadway.

“It’s driving me nuts,” DeGrom says of his famous flowing hair. “I’ve been saying I’m going to cut it off, but I don’t know if I can. It gets hot. It’s pretty annoying really because I have to wear a hat all the time.”

A shorn DeGrom would be as odd a sight as a svelte Colon. (A semi-Colon?)



Bartolo Colon

AGE: **42**
ERA: **4.46**
K/BB: **7.55**



Jon Niese

AGE: **28**
ERA: **3.61**
K/BB: **2.12**

The righthander is shaped like a garden gnome, complete with perpetual smile, perhaps as a wink to the extension of his career that seemed impossible six years ago. Colon missed the last two months of the 2009 season with elbow and shoulder trouble. In April '10, doctors took stem cells from fatty tissue in Colon's hip and from his bone marrow, and injected them into his elbow and shoulder to repair a damaged ligament and a torn rotator cuff. Since then Colon is 60–45 with a 3.66 ERA; he has made another \$26 million; and he was suspended for 50 games in '12 for PEDs.

"Bartolo," Warthen says, "is the most flexible guy we have on our whole team. He can wake up Christmas morning and put either leg up above a door frame, and he can do the splits."

As for Niese, Warthen calls him the Enigma. With a career record of 55–59, the lefthander been a rotation fixture for six years, long enough to rank ninth in franchise history in strikeouts. He typically throws his fastball 90 mph, which, in this band is like being the Ringo Starr of vocals. "Unfortunately," Warthen says, "he thinks he's a power pitcher with Harvey and DeGrom. If he does not use his changeup and curveball, he has a propensity to give up big innings."

Even Harvey, however, envies Niese's greatest tool: an unshakable confidence. Nobody needs to give Niese a pep talk or a hug after a bad game.

"Jon is an interesting guy," Harvey says. "Not in a negative way, but there's always . . . there's never anything that he did wrong. It's a great way to look at pitching. It's 'They got lucky.' I'm not going to say he's full of excuses, which is cool, but I wish I had more of that in myself."

DAN WARTHEN was Noah Syndergaard 40 years ago. Warthen was drafted 28th overall by Montreal upon graduating from high school in Nebraska in 1971. Syndergaard was drafted 38th overall by Toronto upon graduating from high school in Texas in 2010. Both reached the big leagues at age 22 with fastballs that approached 100 mph. Warthen is a reminder of how it can go wrong.

A lefthander, Warthen made his debut with the 1975 Expos. His first manager was Gene Mauch, who oversaw the collapse of the '64 Phillies,

a team that blew a 6½-game lead in late September by losing nine in a row—four of them when a panicking Mauch twice started Jim Bunning and Chris Short on two days' rest.

On July 11, 1975, in Atlanta, with the 34–46 Expos already 15 games out of first place, Mauch allowed Warthen to throw 142 pitches before finally removing him in the 10th inning for a pinch hitter with the score tied at one. Just two days later, Mauch summoned Warthen out of the bullpen in the seventh inning of a game the Expos were losing 4–3. He threw 17 pitches and walked the bases loaded before Mauch finally pulled him.

Warthen felt an ache in his arm. It would never be the same.

In July and August of 1975, Mauch permitted Warthen to throw 130 pitches or more four times. (All the pitchers in baseball combined since Opening Day 2014 have thrown that many pitches just twice.) In one game against the Giants, Warthen threw 164 pitches while working into the 11th inning. Five days later he threw 130 pitches.

Warthen's career ERA that night in Atlanta stood at 2.94. It was 4.59 thereafter. He was out of the majors by 1979, at age 26, another in the hundreds of forgotten casualties lost in our Kodachrome desire to promote outliers such as Jim Palmer, Nolan Ryan and Tom Seaver as the proxies of a day when "men were men" and pitchers took the ball often.

The abuse of Warthen's arm began early. He threw more complete games as a teenager in two months of Class A ball (10) than Harvey, DeGrom,



Steven Matz

AGE: **24**
ERA: **1.32**
K/BB: **2.80**

Syndergaard, Wheeler and Matz have thrown in 485 professional starts combined (seven). In 1976, Warthen was one of seven pitchers 25 and under who started games for an Expos team that lost 107 games. None of those young pitchers started a major league game after age 26.

In 1981, still only 29, Warthen took a job coaching in the Pittsburgh minor league system. And so began a career that has taken him from Bend, Ore., to Spartanburg, S.C., to Calgary to Seattle to Las Vegas to San Diego to Toledo to Detroit to Norfolk to Los Angeles to New York, where he was hired midway through the 2008 season to replace Rick Peterson as the Mets' pitching coach. "Dan is awesome," Niese says. "He's like a philosopher. He does a lot of homework, he understands our deliveries, and he knows what to say to get you back on track."

Bespectacled and lighthearted, Warthen has the easy bearing of a grandfather who pulls quarters out of his grandkids' ears. He likes to crack up the new pitchers with the same old jokes.

"What do you call a deer that can't see? No-eye deer."

All these years on the road, all the miles and all the pitchers between Mauch and the Mets—"I have one of those stupid memories: I can remember every pitch of every count of every game"—have

**"I WANT THIS TO BE
HARVEY'S STAFF,"
SAYS WARTHEN.
"AT TIMES HE
OVERDOES IT—BECAUSE
THEY FOLLOW HIM.
NOBODY MISSES
A HARVEY PITCH."**

brought this pitching sage to the best young staff in baseball, and one of the best strike-throwing staffs of any kind. "One thing we may be getting now is too many strikes," he says. "There is such a thing as picking your battles, and we can do a better job of that. You try to help them understand it, but testosterone gets in the way a lot of times."

He is thinking of Harvey, for whom Warthen has cut postsurgery bullpen sessions to as few as an easy 20 pitches, rather than a hard 40. They work on getting the left foot down in time to execute a fastball to the glove-side corner.

"If you can execute that pitch, you can win," Warthen says. The philosopher dives into his canon: "But adrenaline gets greater when you're in the game. It's like fire: It can be a valuable servant but a dangerous master. That's when he gets away from it. They all do it. The young ones will."

Another pearl: "See how easy you can throw hard." Then he gives the proper annotation: "That's Sandy [Koufax], by the way."

ON SUMMER nights Citi Field can seem like the Apollo Theater, or Carolines on Broadway or any other New York institution where the entertainment is as varied as the dates on the calendar.

One night it might be Colon, whom a newcomer could mistake for a guy from the local car dealership throwing out the ceremonial first pitch. Colon throws a blizzard's worth of fastballs—85% of his pitches. As with snowflakes, though, each one has its own look. Colon can vary the speed and movement with uncanny precision. He began the year walking one of the first 227 batters he faced. He averages less than a walk per nine innings; nobody this old in baseball history ever had this kind of control.

So confident is Colon of his fastball, which averages a modest 90.5 mph, that he has little use for the reams

of scouting reports and data on opposing hitters. He wants only two pieces of information: who swings at the first pitch, and whom do I not want to go in on. "And for him," Warthen says, "that means [he's] going farther in."

On another night it's Niese playing the Enigma, using a half dozen pitches like the thick menu of a 24-hour Queens diner. What'll it be tonight? Seven starts into the season, Niese had thrown his four-seamer, two-seamer, changeup, slider, curve or cutter at least 17 times in any one game.

The next night it's Syndergaard, whose Nordic heritage, 98-mph fastball and hammer of a curveball—"The hook from hell," Collins calls it—inspires Mets fans to come dressed in Viking headgear. After the 2012 season Alderson, in a trade with Toronto, turned a 38-year-old knuckleballer (and freshly minted Cy Young Award winner), R.A. Dickey, into a long-term battery: Syndergaard and catcher Travis d'Arnaud.

"He asks more questions than anybody has ever asked of me," Warthen says of Syndergaard. "Why would you do this? Why did you do that? I'm very excited for him." There is one concern: Syndergaard can be Ivan Drago on the mound. His arm action is mechanical. "The hitters get a good look," Warthen says. "It's so methodical, almost statuesque. You're up, you show, you throw."

On another night, with his locks flying and his sinews firing, the balletic DeGrom turns Citi Field into Lincoln Center. His 95-mph four-seam fastball actually is more difficult to hit (.162) than Harvey's 97-mph heater (.274). He

pulls off this trick because, as with his personality, there is a jauntiness to his delivery. Ease of movement trumps brute force. Not only is DeGrom blessed with a long stride, which shortens the distance his pitches have to cover, but he also has a forward release point. The ball leaves most pitchers' fingers when the throwing hand is about even with the head. With DeGrom the hand travels a bit farther forward before the ball comes out. Pedro Martinez was blessed with this same late release, which fools a hitter's usual timing mechanism. It's why teammates regard a simple game of catch with DeGrom as a challenge.

The biggest nights of all belong to the Dark Knight, when the stands fill with people in Batman headgear, some of them old enough to remember when Gooden gave Mets fans that same tingling awareness that History always lurks right around the corner. Only six pitchers struck out more batters than Harvey in their first 50 starts: Gooden, Yu Darvish, Mark Prior, Hideo Nomo, Kerry Wood and Herb Score—the names of phenoms, sure, but also names that flutter like yellow caution flags. None of those prodigies was an All-Star starting pitcher after age 27.

The Mets feature four of the 15 hardest-throwing starters in baseball: Syndergaard (first with an average fastball velocity of 97.0), Harvey (fourth, 95.9), DeGrom (14th, 94.7) and Matz (also 94.7). No other team has more than one starter in the top 15. The Mets' rotation is reminiscent of the 2003 Cubs, when Wood, Prior and Carlos Zambrano, all between the ages of 22 and 26, were among the 10 hardest-throwing starters in the game. Chicago rode its three young power pitchers—rode them hard—to within one game of the NL pennant, whereupon the franchise's tiny window slammed shut. The trio never again was healthy for the same full season, and the Cubs haven't won a playoff game since.

Velocity is a powerful but cruel baseball god. The clock is always ticking, and the Mets know this. Lacking experience behind the plate, athleticism on defense and skill at bat, the team is under pressure to better support their exceptional starting pitchers. With trade season approaching, Alderson is inclined to keep all of his young arms. "If you look back on the time I've been here, we haven't traded that many prospects," he says. "What is a strength quickly can become a weakness—nowhere more so than pitching. By the way, Syndergaard is just working his way into the rotation. Matz is working his way into the rotation. It's not like these guys are slam dunks and you cruise to the World Series with them."

Alderson runs through his lineup. He likes D'Arnaud (currently recovering from a sprained left elbow) and first baseman Lucas Duda, he thinks shortstop-turned-second-baseman Wilmer Flores "notwithstanding all the hand-wringing by many people, has done a pretty good job for us," he hopes to get third baseman David Wright back from a back injury, and



JOY OF SIX

The Mets hope a six-man rotation will preserve their pitchers' arms—though they need to get everyone healthy at once.

"for better or for worse, we're committed to the outfield," where Michael Cuddyer, Juan Lagares and Curtis Granderson are all signed through at least next year.

"The question is, who's out there that's better at a reasonable price?" he says.

Last month the Mets lost seven games in a row while scoring a total of nine runs. Each defeat, in its numbing repetitiveness, hit them like another hot, dry day in a drought. All this great pitching was going to waste, like a fallow field. Before every loss, in the manner of a support group, the starting pitchers gathered in the bullpen to watch that day's pitcher warm up (all except Colon, who keeps to his own pregame program in the clubhouse when he is not starting). The starters began the ritual this year, with Warthen having pilfered the idea from former Cardinals pitching coach Dave Duncan.

"It shows great camaraderie," Warthen says. "I love 'em. I really do. This is as much fun as I've ever had. It's a young group, but talented? Wow. These [guys] are good—with a chance to be great."

A chance. It's where the modest hopes of the Mets have begun for almost a decade. Since Har-

Scout's Take: The Young Guns

WHO WOULD YOU RATHER BUILD AROUND? A RIVAL SCOUT RANKS THE METS' 27-AND-UNDER STARTERS

1. MATT HARVEY (R)

Great competitor, his fastball's 94-97 mph, he can ride it up or sink it. He's got a hard slider, 87-90, an 81-83 curveball that he can use to both sides and a changeup that he can sink down and away from lefthanded hitters. He comes at you harder than almost anyone in baseball today. Harvey's biggest issue is going to be holding his delivery together. He's a breakdown candidate: I don't like his landing foot, I don't like the way he finishes, he puts a lot of pressure on that arm. If he stays healthy, he's got the highest upside of the bunch—but it's a huge *if*.

2. JACOB DEGROM (R)

He, like Harvey, has a power slider, and he has a backdoor curve he uses for lefthanders. But everything keys on his fastball command. He's not going to blow you away with velocity; he has to pitch. One advantage DeGrom has over the others is he can flat hit. And five years from now I think he's going to be the healthiest of the group.

3. NOAH SYNDERGAARD (R)

The wild card: A lot of ability, but he's the least consistent of the big three. He's got the same velocity Harvey does, and that big ol' downer curveball. He's also got a slider and a changeup—he has all the pitches, to this point he just hasn't commanded them as well as the top two. But he's right in that mix.

4. STEVEN MATZ (L)

A porcelain pitcher—he breaks all the time. When he's healthy, he's got power stuff: a 94-96 fastball, big-time sink and a good curveball. Long term he has to develop a change and throw his breaking ball to both sides. There's a lot of ability there. But he's been hurt so much, and the Mets' track record of diagnosing and treating injuries is not real strong.

5. ZACK WHEELER (R) (Left)

Another hard thrower: hard slider, a curveball that's pretty good against lefthanders. Abilitywise he's fifth of these five, but he has the potential, if he comes back [from Tommy John surgery] and finds better fastball command, to jump right into the middle of this pack.

vey was drafted in 2010, the club never has finished closer to first place than 17 games out. In '12, when Harvey arrived in the majors, there was talk of a chance, and again in '13 when Wheeler arrived, and again in '14 when DeGrom arrived, and again in '15 when Syndergaard and Matz arrived. "Very similar to Kershaw," Harvey, echoing Warthen, says of Matz. "Similar with that backdoor curveball, the running two-seamer, the similar high arm slot. . . ."

But when does the actual chance, and not the promise of one, begin? Harvey is tired of waiting.

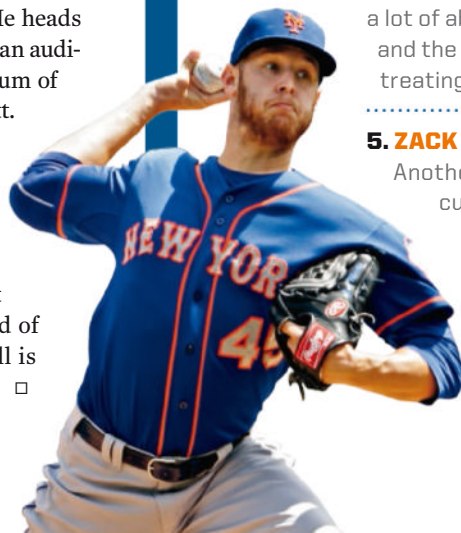
"You know," he says, "I initially refused this interview because I didn't think now was a good time to talk about the future, which everybody wants to talk about, because, one, I think that's unfair to the rest of the guys in the clubhouse, and two, nothing against Mets fans, but the typical excuse is, 'It's coming!' or 'It's almost here!' And that's unacceptable to me."

"The reason we get paid on the 25-man roster is to concentrate on the now. Every pitch, every at bat, every groundball and every game. I think once you start using excuses—whether it's people talking about how we need another hitter, or more runs—if you start looking for outside help, you're not going to do the job internally and you've already given up your edge. That's the biggest thing I've tried to bring to this staff."

It is a big job, even for a superhero. Stuck to the top of Harvey's locker at Citi Field is the silhouette of a winged Batman logo, enclosing an image of Harvey in mid-delivery. Next to his locker is a placard with another logo: his initials, MH, atop one another, with the peaks of the M cleverly extended to mimic the pointed ears of Batman's hooded disguise. It's clear that this is the job Harvey wants, even only 52 starts into his career. As Warthen says, "We're not asking Matt to do something he wouldn't want to do."

On Harvey Days at home, the pitcher leaves his locker about 30 minutes before game time, makes a right turn out the clubhouse door, down a flight of steps into the dugout and then up the dugout stairs and into the wide horseshoe of Citi Field. He heads toward the bullpen, where the other starters, an audience of believers, will be there to hear the hum of his fastball and the thwack of the catcher's mitt.

This is the moment, until Harvey has his way, that defines the Mets. It is a moment of anticipation. Pitch by pitch, with power and concision, Harvey and his fellow starters want to author a new definition. It's time for the elements of their style to fit the words of Strunk 97 years ago: "Instead of announcing that what you are about to tell is interesting, make it so." □





TOM WATSON SAYS FAREWELL

THE MEMORIES (GOOD AND BAD) REMAIN VIVID FOR THE FIVE-TIME BRITISH OPEN CHAMP, WHO AS HE PREPARES TO TEE IT UP AT ST. ANDREWS ONE LAST TIME RELECTS ON A STYLE OF PLAY HE GREW TO LOVE

By Alan Shipnuck

Photograph by
Drew Gardner for Sports Illustrated



OM WATSON took a stroll on the Old Course the other day. A bitter gale was blowing in off of St. Andrews Bay, and as he squinted into the wind, the cragginess of his face was accentuated; he looked as weather-beaten as any of the stone walls in the auld grey town. Watson had arrived in Scotland 48 hours earlier to do promotional work for Adams Golf, his longtime sponsor, and he had barely slept since. In the Old Course Hotel that morning he looked a bit logy, but as soon as old Tom neared the links, his gait quickened. Next to the 16th fairway is a fence with horizontal wires spaced about a foot apart. Watson, 65, bent over and shimmied through the gap like a boxer entering the ring. “I’m a farm boy. I know my way around a fence,” woofed Watson, who was born and raised in Kansas City, Mo., and now makes his home on a ranch outside of town.

Striding across the 16th fairway, he stopped to tap his toe on the ancient earth. “This turf!” he said, voice rising. “There’s nothing like this turf anywhere in the world. Isn’t it something?” It might sound funny for a man to grow misty over a glorified lawn, but for Watson, walking the ground where golf was born is understandably spiritual.

When he reached the tee at 17, the Road Hole, Watson fixed a hard gaze on the famous OLD COURSE HOTEL sign. Just like that, he was back in 1984. “You want to drive it over the R,” he said, “but I left mine out to the right. I wasn’t sure it was even inbounds.” He was 34 then and at the tail end of one of the most dominant stretches in golf history. In the preceding 8½ years he had won 35 tournaments, including a U.S. Open, two Masters and the five British Opens that define his legacy. Along the way he dusted Jack Nicklaus so often that the Bear once told Watson, “I’m tired of giving it my best shot and not having it be good enough.”

By the ’84 British, Watson felt an indefinable funk eroding his game. In the final round he was in a dogfight with Seve Ballesteros, then 27. The swashbuckling Spaniard—convention demands the adjective—was as fearless as Watson once had been. They were tied as the action moved to the 71st hole.

“It’s over here somewhere,” Watson said, scouring the Road Hole fairway. The terrain of the Old Course is as alive as the ocean, pitching this way and that, heaving up and crashing down. Watson was doggedly looking for a ripple of turf where his drive had settled 31 years earlier. A sprinkler marked 184 offered a clue. Nearby he found a round, ankle-high bump. “Yes, this is the one,” Watson said. The specificity of a golfer’s memory always amazes, but it is idiosyncratic—Nicklaus recalls his victories in forensic detail but almost nothing about the losses, while Watson retains the tiniest particulars of his most bitter defeats. “If it had been a flat lie,” he continued, “I would have played a more conservative shot to the very front of the green. That’s where Jack always aimed. But with this little upslope I knew I could get my 2-iron up in the air, and I could use the wind too. It was into me, which would help the ball land softer. So I took an aggressive line.”

In these pages Dan Jenkins described the shot as “a semishank, half-flier, out-of-control fade-slice that wanted to go to Edinburgh.” Watson’s ball flew the green and settled near the stone wall at the edge of the property. He did well to chip to 30 feet. As he studied the par putt, the Old Course shook; ahead at 18, Ballesteros had rolled in a 15-footer for birdie and celebrated with a series of fist pumps, an image that would become iconic. Watson had once been the most feared putter in golf, but he was past the point of being able to will the ball into the hole. He missed, and that one confidence-eviscerating bogey dropped the curtain on the Watson era: He would win only twice in the next 12 years. The vacuum was filled by Ballesteros, who begat a European invasion led by Nick Faldo, who had usurped Greg Norman, who had been the favorite player of a kid growing up in Cypress, Calif. Tiger Woods reached the PGA Tour in 1996, the same year Watson, with a rebuilt swing, won Nicklaus’s Memorial Tournament. His career reaches its denouement this week when he plays in his 38th and final British Open, at the Old Course. “It’s starting to hit me,” Watson says. “I’m a little melancholy. It’s like the death of a loved one: There’s sadness, of course, but you’re left with so many wonderful memories. It’s those memories that sustain you.”



“THIS TURF,” WATSON SAID, VOICE RISING, AS HE WALKED THE *Old Course*. “THERE’S NOTHING LIKE THIS TURF ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. *Isn’t it something?*”



CARNOUSTIE

T’S HARD to believe now, but Watson was once considered too soft to close out tournaments. There was a jauntiness about him during his early years on the PGA Tour, accentuated by

the freckles and the red hair. Herbert Warren Wind captured Watson perfectly in 1981 when he wrote, “It is easy to picture him sucking on a stem of grass as he heads for the fishing hole with a pole over his shoulder.”

By 1975, Watson’s fifth season, he had only one victory and was probably best known for losing the ’74 U.S. Open, when he had the 54-hole lead but bled out with a 79 on Sunday in the so-called Massacre at Winged Foot. Two months before the British Open he played in the Byron Nelson Classic, during which he forged a lasting friendship with the host, another farm boy who had gone on to big things. Nelson imparted simple swing thoughts and homespun advice on golf’s inner battle; duly inspired, Watson went out and won the tournament. He carried the momentum into his first British Open, at Carnoustie, the most demanding of the courses in the rota. On his first day in Scotland, Watson drove to Carnoustie with Hubert Green and John Mahaffey for a practice round, but they were turned away, told that the course was closed for maintenance. (Can you imagine?) They wound up on the humble locals’ links in the town where they were staying, Montifieth.

On the opening hole there—Watson’s first swing in Scotland—he ripped a drive down the center of the fairway but couldn’t find his ball. He searched and



1984
At St. Andrews (top), Watson came to the 71st tied for the lead, but he was undone by the Road Hole.

1975 AND '77
Watson won in a playoff in his first appearance at the British (opposite), then vanquished his greatest rival in the Duel in the Sun.

searched before dropping another and playing on. As he walked toward the green, Watson was dismayed to discover his drive had been sucked into a tiny, unseen pot bunker on the edge of the fairway, some 60 yards from where he had been looking. “I remember thinking very clearly, If this is links golf, I don’t like it,” he says.

Watson had grown up at the Kansas City Country Club, a stuffy, conservative enclave. He learned the game from his father, Ray, a stern, exacting figure and a strong player. Little wonder that Watson “had a specific, even Catholic idea of how golf should be played,” Joe Posnanski wrote in his recent biography, *The Secret of Golf*. “Good shots were to be rewarded. Bad shots were to be punished.” The vagaries of the linksland challenged Watson’s worldview, but he couldn’t help but be stimulated by it all. “I didn’t care for Carnoustie, but I set about learning how to play it,” Watson says.

The weather was calm during the first three rounds, and after scores of 71-67-69, Watson was in fourth, three shots off the lead. He was the beneficiary of two fortuitous events before he teed off on Sunday. At his rental home there was a knock at the door, and a young girl presented him with a sprig of white

heather wrapped in foil, saying it was for good luck. There is a mythic quality to the story, which makes sense since it’s informed by a Celtic folk tale: The warrior Oscar is wounded in battle, and in his final, dying moment he picks a sprig of purple heather and asks it to be taken to his love, Malvina; her tears turn the heather white, and she offers the prayer, “May the white heather, symbol of my sorrow, bring good fortune to all who find it.” Watson isn’t a sentimental guy, but beginning that day he carried the heather in his golf bag for more than a year.

Then, just before he teed off on Sunday, he crossed paths with his mentor Nelson. In the past when he was around the lead, Watson had played

aggressively to the point of recklessness. Nelson advised him that because of the howling wind, any score around par would give him a chance at winning. Watson replayed those words in his mind throughout the round and competed with the patience and resolve that would become his hallmarks. He was even par for the day playing the 72nd hole, where a big drive and clutch 9-iron set up a birdie that ultimately got him into an 18-hole playoff against Jack Newton. The next day the two were all square playing the par-5 14th hole when Newton pitched it stone dead for a birdie. All Watson did was hole his ensuing chip for an eagle and then play flawlessly coming home. After

the victory, Jenkins wrote, “Another authentic American hero was born,” but Watson felt differently. “I still hadn’t really learned to win,” he says. “But that was an important part of the building process of steeling myself and being able to win under the most intense pressure.”



TURNBERRY

ATSON LIKES to talk a lot about the process. He is analytical by nature. During a walk through the cemetery in St. Andrews, he engaged a slightly dazed stonemason in a long discussion about his craft. If a professional photographer is using Nikon instead of Canon, Watson wants to know why. Debating politics

is blood sport for him. At the highest level, golf is largely metaphysical; trying to grasp the unknowable is what has kept Watson inspired and engaged for all of these decades. With his breakthrough at Carnoustie the search had just begun, for he still had a flaw in his swing that could lead to a violent hook. Late in the next year, at an otherwise meaningless pro-am in Japan, Watson had a hanging lie on a steep slope, so he concentrated on keeping the clubface square to the ball a bit longer on the backswing. The purity of the strike was a revelation that led him to transform his action.

At the outset of the ’77 season, he won back-to-back at Pebble Beach and San Diego, setting tournament scoring records at both stops. But the process remains never-ending. In the run-up to the Masters, he hooked a

ball into the water on the 72nd hole to lose the Players, and a week later at Hilton Head he coughed up a four-stroke lead on Sunday. Whether Watson's new swing—and his psyche—could hold up was the big question as he took a share of the lead into the final round at Augusta, with Nicklaus lurking. Big Jack threw seven birdies at Watson and moved into a tie for the lead, but the young challenger never flinched. On 17, Watson holed a nasty 18-footer for a birdie to go back ahead. Nicklaus was in the 18th fairway when the roar washed over him like a tidal wave, forcing him to back off his shot. As he told Posnanski, “That’s the only tournament in my life when I got flustered and couldn’t regroup.” He dumped his approach in the greenside bunker and made bogey. Watson had felled the champ.

This was the backdrop for the Duel in the Sun three months later at Turnberry, the best and most mythologized golf ever played. Watson and Nicklaus both opened with scores of 68-70-65, leaving the field behind. In the final round Nicklaus made two quick birdies to lead by three strokes after four holes. His advantage was still two with six holes to play. Watson, drawing on his Midwestern stoicism, was undeterred. “Nothing ever fazed him,” says Scott Simpson, who outdueled Watson to win the 1987 U.S. Open. “He was a fighter. He hits the shot, he marches on, and then hits the next one. He had a great attitude, especially for the major championships.”

Indeed, Watson holed a tricky 13-footer at the 13th hole to pull within one, and at 15 he buried a 60-footer to pull even. The pressure was suffocating, so imagine Nicklaus's surprise when he saw Watson standing on the 16th tee with an impish grin. “This is what it’s all about, isn’t it?” Watson said.

“You bet it is,” came the reply.

They were still tied playing the par-5 17th when Watson hit what he calls “one of the best 3-irons of my life,” leaving 20 feet for eagle. Straining to match him, Nicklaus missed the green with a 4-iron and couldn’t get up and down. Watson’s tap-in birdie gave him the lead, and after a perfect drive on the 72nd hole he had 180 yards left, the distance he usually hit his 5-iron. His caddie, a barroom brawler named Alfie Fyles, handed him a 7-iron, saying only, “The way your adrenaline’s pumpin’, Mister.” Watson followed with an utterly ruthless shot, to 2½ feet. Nicklaus, as the script demanded, rolled in a 50-footer for birdie, making Watson’s gimme a little less so. He rapped in the putt and once again had taken down Big Jack, 65 to 66.

Watson had worked as hard at the game as anyone since Ben Hogan, propelled by a fear of failure born from a father who was impossible to please. It was at Turnberry that Watson at long last felt like a champion. All these years later he says, “That was the most significant victory of my career because that was when I finally believed I could play with the big boys. I played against the best, with the best, and I beat the best.”



MUIRFIELD

ATSON'S THIRD claret jug came in 1980, on perhaps the most venerated course in the rota, when he had rounds of 68-70-64-69 for a then Open-record total of 271. It was the best performance of what he calls his best season, but for him the unquestioned highlight came when hardly anybody was watch-

ing, on Tuesday afternoon.

“I had just finished my practice round,” Watson says. “A bunch of us [players] were staying at Greywalls”—a lovely hotel that sits just behind Muirfield’s 10th tee—“and in the library there we’d often gather for a beer.



WATSON IS *analytical by nature*. DURING A WALK THROUGH THE CEMETERY, HE ENGAGED A SLIGHTLY DAZED STONEMASON IN A LONG DISCUSSION *about his craft*.

In walks Arnold Palmer and Jerry Pate and Andy Bean and I forget who else. They had just finished their practice round, and Jerry was pretty chatty. He had beaten Arnold out of \$300. He was all over Arnold. All Arnold says is, ‘Give me a beer.’ Jerry is still ragging on Arnold, and you could see the steam coming out of his ears, and finally Arnold says, ‘C’mon, Tommy, let’s go play these so-and-so’s.’ So we went and played an emergency nine.

“We started on number 10, and Arnie and I drove it in the rough. I had to lay up short of the cross bunkers, and he, well, he wound up in his pocket. I’ll never forget it: Jerry hit a beautiful drive right down the middle and this beautiful second shot with a 5-iron right at the hole, and he yells, ‘Get in!’ He’s posing and preening, and it almost did go in. I hit my chip about 25 feet past the hole and then stepped up and made the putt, and whaddya know, Jerry misses his little one.

“By the time we get to the 16th tee his partner, Andy Bean, says, ‘I’m not pressing these guys anymore.’ We got Arnie’s money back and then some because I made

every putt. And I kept making them all the way through till Sunday. But to play 27 holes on Tuesday of the Open Championship week? That's a love for the game."



ROYAL TROON

IT'S A curious sidenote that Watson won his first three Opens without feeling any romance for the linksland; the tempestuous winds and unpredictable way the ball rode the turf still

offended his sense of justice. In 1981 he began to see the light. Ahead of that year's Open he barnstormed across Scotland and Ireland with Sandy Tatum, who at 95 remains one of the game's grand old men. Tatum was the 1942 NCAA champion at Stanford (Watson's alma mater) and later the president of the USGA, and he has the soul of a poet. "Basically, Sandy helped me understand that accepting a bad bounce, and recovering

turn on Sunday, but the leader, 25-year-old Nick Price, was already looking shaky. Troon's 11th is the celebrated Railway Hole, a 481-yard par-5 that was playing into a punishing wind. Now two shots back, Watson smote a 3-iron to three feet for an eagle that tied him for the lead. Watson methodically parred his way to the clubhouse while Price bogeyed three of the last six holes. "I never felt like I was going to win that one," Watson says. "Some tournaments you take, some are handed to you."

Did you deserve to win it?

"Deserve has nothing to do with it. I shot the lowest score. End of story."



ROYAL BIRKDALE

FAN entire tournament can be distilled into one swing, it happened at the '83 Open. Watson came to the 72nd hole leading by one over Bean and Hale Irwin, who had whiffed on a two-inch putt the day before. Birkdale's final hole is a macho 473-yard par-4 that plays between towering sand hills. Watson split the fairway and had 213 yards to the hole, with a strong wind quartering off the left. He pulled out his 2-iron.

"I can still feel that shot in my body," he says. "I can see the ball in the air. I can see it coming down right at the flag, but then the crowd just engulfed the fairway, running under the gallery ropes, so I couldn't see how close it was. The cheer from the crowd told me it was pretty close, but I guess I knew that already. I look back at all my Open Championship victories, that 2-iron is the shot I probably remember the most. Tough club to hit, wind in my face, and everything on the line. It's the shot I'm most proud of." The ball had settled 15 feet from the hole, and two putts later Watson had his fifth Open title.



1980

Watson, who has fond memories of an impromptu practice round, set an Open scoring record at Muirfield (top left).

1982 AND '83

After mounting a back-nine charge at Royal Troon (left), Watson won a year later at Royal Birkdale with a clutch closing par.

from it, is one of the game's great challenges," Watson says. "And I've always loved a challenge."

Watson arrived at the '82 Open still flying high from his U.S. Open victory a month earlier, at Pebble Beach, where he famously chipped in on the 71st hole. Vanquished again, Nicklaus told him afterward, "You little sonofabitch, you're something else."

At Troon, Watson never had his best stuff, but he delighted in grinding out solid rounds on the first three days. "Anyone can shoot a good score when they're playing well," Watson says. "But to post a good score when you're struggling with your game—when you have to fight hard for every par—that's the ultimate satisfaction." He was five strokes off the lead when he made the



ST. ANDREWS

IVE BY the 2-iron, die by the 2-iron. It was the following year at the Old Course that Watson made a mess of the Road Hole and lost to Ballesteros. The defeat was crushing for a couple of reasons. It was a golden opportunity to tie Harry Vardon's record of six Open victories. There was also a sense of

unfinished business with the Old Course. In 1978, Watson had taken the lead into the final round, but he made four straight bogeys on the front nine and was run over by Nicklaus, who won an Open at St. Andrews for the second time. Nicklaus's obsession with winning on the Old Course was imbued in him by Bobby Jones, who took the Open there in 1927. Says Nicklaus of his boyhood hero, "He always said that a golfer's record—a great golfer's record—is never complete unless he wins at St. Andrews."

There are a couple of places in the game of golf you want to win. I think [the Old Course] is probably the most special place of all to win a golf tournament.”

Watson has been listening to this for nearly 40 years now, but he refuses to take the bait: “Sure, winning one in St. Andrews would’ve been nice. But I won more than my share.”

Watson has had his ups and downs since the ’84 Open. He divorced and remarried. (He is the father of five and grandfather to three.) He developed a drinking problem and then kicked it. His beloved caddie, Bruce Edwards, died of Lou Gehrig’s disease, inspiring Watson to aggressively fund-raise for a cure. He captained the U.S. Ryder Cup team to a thrilling victory in 1993 and a demoralizing defeat last year. (In a weird way the loss enhanced Watson’s brand; he was his usual crusty self, and if today’s marshmallow-soft prima donnas couldn’t appreciate his wisdom, well, that was their problem, right? Watson refused to partake in the sniping that followed the loss, an admirable old-school restraint.)

Following the loss to Ballesteros, Watson’s game declined rapidly, to the point that he says, “I hated golf.” It’s a startling admission because no one has ever seemed to love the game more. In 1994 he discovered on the driving range at Hilton Head what he calls “the secret”: By taking the club back far to the inside and then dropping it to the outside on the downswing, he had a move that repeated without fail. A few months later he returned to Turnberry and says he had the best ball-striking week of his life. But Watson’s putting was typically awful, and Price surpassed him on the back nine on Sunday, payback for 12 years earlier. That night Watson was moping in his hotel room when Nicklaus cajoled him into playing on the pitch-and-putt course in the shadow of the Turnberry Hotel. Along with their wives they stayed out there until dark, a treasured memory for them all.

As crazy as it sounds, you can’t count out Watson for this year’s Open. Because the Old Course plays so firm and fast, long hitters will be using irons off many tees, negating the old man’s distance disadvantage. Watson’s most important tune-up came at last month’s U.S. Senior Open, where he damn near shot his age, posting an opening 66 en route to a tie for seventh. No track in the world rewards local knowledge quite like the Old Course, so Watson will enjoy a home field advantage similar to Turnberry, where he lost in a playoff in 2009 at age 59, one of the more remarkable feats in golf history.

Watson had arrived on the 72nd hole needing only a par to win. After a perfect drive he had 164 yards to the front of the green, 189 to the hole. With the wind at his back he was torn between an 8- and a 9-iron. You could practically hear Alfie Files whispering from the grave—*The way your adrenaline’s pumpin’, Mister*—but Watson went with the stronger club. His ball landed exactly where he was aiming, on the front edge, but it caught a tiny downslope and took a hard bounce forward. “Maybe the ghost of Harry Vardon was blowing on it,” Watson cracks. The ball trickled across the putting surface and over the back.

Now Watson faced another choice: chip or putt? The pin was cut tight to the back of the green, just beyond a waist-high swale. Using the wedge would give Watson a better chance to knock it close, but it also brought into play the



2009
At Turnberry, Watson's run for a record-tying sixth claret jug—at 59—fell breathtakingly short.

horrifying possibility of leaving the chip short and having the ball roll back to his feet, costing him the tournament. The young, fearless Watson would surely have chipped it, but now he acceded to his nerves and went with the putter, knocking it eight feet past. The par putt never had a chance; the stroke was a nervous jab. He had nothing left for the ensuing four-hole playoff and went meekly against Stewart Cink.

Afterward Watson was again holed up in his room in the Turnberry Hotel, inconsolable. He refused to take any calls until Nicklaus, who had been glued to his television at home in Palm Beach, Fla., got through to Watson’s wife,

Hilary. Jack gave his old friend a no-nonsense pep talk: With the whole world watching, Watson had hit a perfect drive and basically a perfect approach shot, and even after a bad bounce had the clarity to choose the right club for his third shot. As for the putt, well, Nicklaus joked that Watson had merely struck it like the old fart he was. What meant the most to Watson was Nicklaus’s affirmation that he had played the right shot from behind the green. “Jack Nicklaus always made the correct decision on the golf course,” Watson says. “His saying I made the right play instantly took away a lot of the anguish.”

Nicklaus promises to tune in again for this Open to watch as his old friend and rival says goodbye. Back in 2005, when Jack played his final Open, at the Old Course, Watson was his playing partner. When it became clear Nicklaus would miss the cut, the final holes of the second round turned into an extended farewell. “I think Tom was more sentimental than I was,” Nicklaus says with a laugh. “Tom was crying on the Swilican Bridge. I looked at him and said, ‘Hey, I’m the one who is finished here, not you.’”

“Tom is very traditional,” Nicklaus continues. “He has a great respect and appreciation for the history of the game. Those things mean a lot to him. It will be very emotional for him to end his career at St. Andrews.”

It’s no surprise that Watson frowns at such talk. “I’m not going there to have fun,” he says. “I’m going there to compete.” Same as it ever was. □

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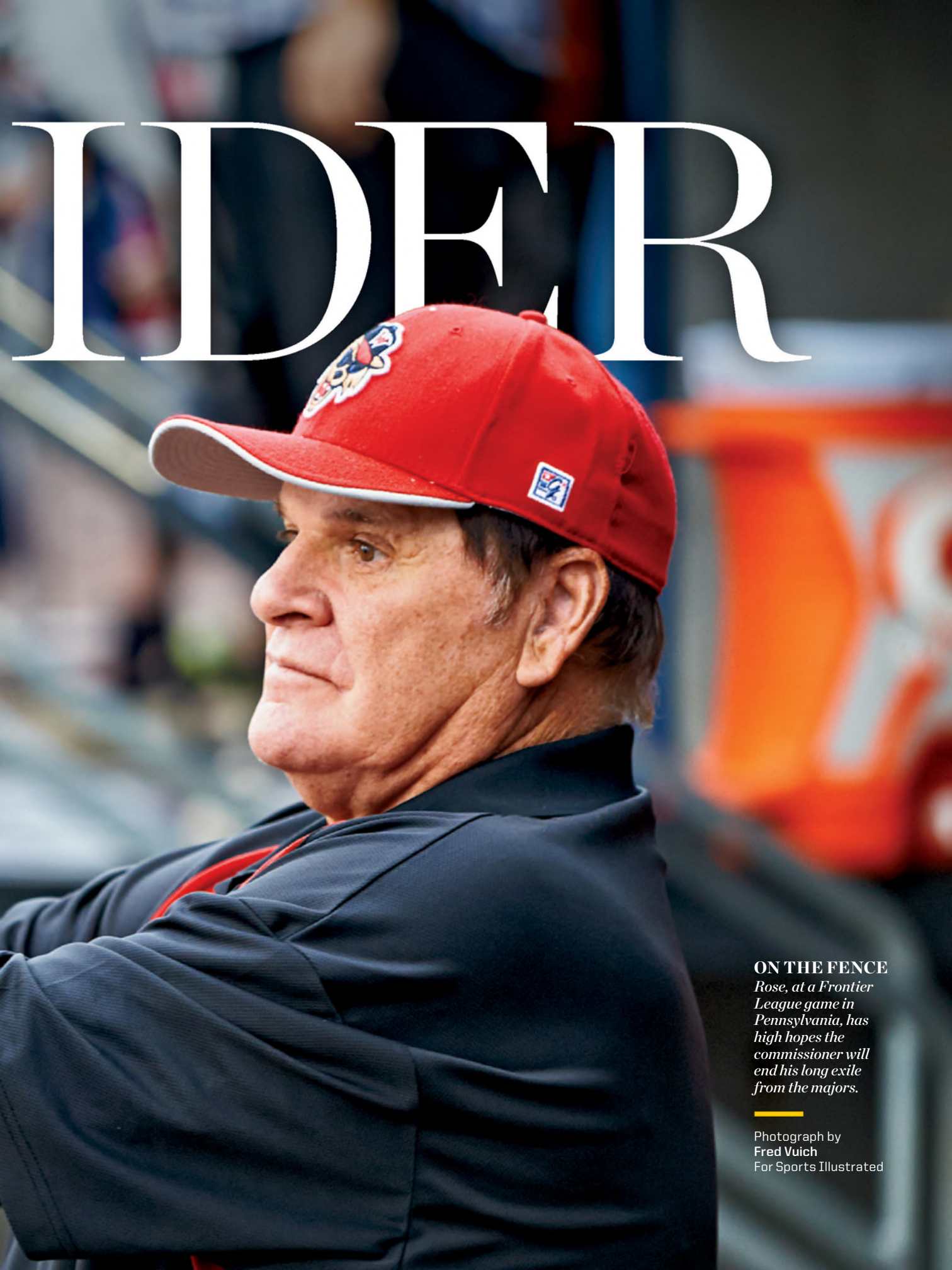
THE
OUTS

A LONG, STRANGE TRIP?
THAT'S THE BEST WAY TO
DESCRIBE A DRIVE FROM VEGAS
TO L.A. WITH PETE ROSE—
NOT TO MENTION THE BANISHED
HIT KING'S QUINTESSENTIALLY
AMERICAN LIFE

BY TOM VERDUCCI



IDER



ON THE FENCE

Rose, at a Frontier League game in Pennsylvania, has high hopes the commissioner will end his long exile from the majors.

Photograph by
Fred Vuich
For Sports Illustrated

CHARLIE WANTS TO HUSTLE.

“Didja eat? Want something here or to take with you?”

I am fluent in two languages: English and body. I listen, and I read. Pete Rose is sitting on the edge of his seat, elbows on the table in front of him, hands folded under his chin, at The Blind Pig, a pub in Las Vegas. I am five minutes late, on account of a cabbie who couldn't find the place.

“No, I'm good.”

“Sure? Water? Something to drink? It's four hours.”

“No, I'm—”

Rose is out of his chair, headed out the door and into the blast furnace of Vegas at midday in summer.

Pete Rose is older than you think, having never acquired the pleasing patina of age that we associate with grandfathers. He is 74. He is so old that on the day he was born in 1941, to Harry and LaVerne Rose in Cincinnati, FDR threw out the Opening Day first pitch in Washington, and Adolf Hitler was featured on the cover of TIME.

Rose is also older than you think because his public persona barely has evolved. He is famous for the way he played baseball (headlong) and the way he left it (headlong, too, as the only man alive on baseball's permanently ineligible list). He hasn't run the bases in 29 years, but he's still Charlie Hustle, playing his role with a longevity more impressive than John Gielgud's as Hamlet. (The great thespian played the young prince more than 500 times between ages 26 and 44.)

Charlie can't actually hustle, though, at least not afoot. The years have thickened him like an oak, and the famous bantam bounce in his step has been replaced by something that resembles the back-and-forth sloshing of water in a hand-carried bucket. He is wearing clothes for comfort: lounge pants, a track jacket and a white-on-white Reds cap. Clusters of hair the color of licorice jut from under the cap.

I follow him to the parking lot. Which car? The 2014 black Bentley Flying Spur, of course.

For the next four hours it's just Rose and me in the Bentley. All that stands between Vegas and Santa Clarita, Calif., in Los Angeles County, are 267 miles of roadway and the truth. There will be a stretch of highway that is notoriously hellish. The truth sometimes will seem even more difficult to navigate.

“America is known for giving second chances,” Rose says.

“When do you get yours?”

“I don't know. It may never come. But if it does, I'll be the happiest guy in the world, because I know what I stood for as a player. Even though I f---ed up, I respected the game. That's why I played like I did.”

Loved or loathed, Pete Rose is a uniquely American insti-

tution, not like Mount Rushmore or the Grand Canyon but more like Branson, Mo., Coney Island, Cadillac Ranch, the World's Largest Ball of Twine, and, yes, Vegas, baby. They are melting pots of kitsch, entertainment and the narratives we affix to them, in the way a child draws in a coloring book. Here's the outline; make of it what you will.

Rose signed out of high school with his hometown team, and without much size, speed or strength he became the all-time hit king, played in more winning games than any other ballplayer and played every game as if it were his last. The effort in Rose defined him even more than the results, endearing him to a country built on the notion of raising yourself up by the bootstraps. The American Dream in spikes.

But hucksterism, roguishness, commercialism and deceit were also part of the Rose playbook. That's America, too, if we're being honest. Fame and its attendant commerce favor the shrewd as well as the earnest. Rose was hired this year as a studio analyst for Fox (which also employs me as a game analyst). We are headed toward his home in Santa Clarita in advance of his work in Fox's Los Angeles studio the next day.

Leaving Las Vegas on I-15 West in a \$200,000 car with a bank teller's son who never attended college and who is engaged to a *Playboy* model less than half his age, I realize that what's on this side of the windshield is just as American as what's on the other side. Great veins of concrete and asphalt stretch before us, throbbing with the pulse of everyday life, as we, like so many others who dreamed to make it in this land, head west for something better.

MILE 38. Primm, Nev.

In the 1920s, when this border town was known as State Line, nothing stood here but a gas station. It was run by a man who, in a nod to his bootlegging business, was known as Whiskey Pete.

In the mid-1950s, Ernest J. Primm took over the gas station and the surrounding 800 acres of desert and added a 12-room motel, a coffee shop and a dozen slots. In 1981 his son Gary took over. Gary built a hotel-casino and, to bait the trap, added one of the world's tallest, fastest roller coasters and displayed the “death car” of Bonnie and Clyde, complete with 167 bullet holes.

It worked. The place has grown to include three casinos

connected by monorail, an arena, a golf course, a convention center and an outlet mall. In 1996 Whiskey Pete's town on the Nevada-California border was renamed Primm.

YOU KNOW I wasn't suspended from baseball for betting on baseball, right? You know that, right?"

I stifle a smile. I know where Rose is going with this. Technically he is correct, but the man did bet on baseball, a fact he denied for 15 years. But this is how Rose plays the game—any game. The guy runs on spit and vinegar by the tankful. He drops f-bombs like salt from a shaker, out of habit as much as for flavor. He's going to extract whatever atomic particle of victory he can. "That's a trait you should take to the grave," he says. "F--- the other guy. I used to love to show up the other guys. I took that s--- in the minor leagues when I used to run to first base on a walk: 'Hollywood! Showboat!' Then all of a sudden they look up and I've got 130 runs scored. Take no f---ing prisoners. I think that's the biggest reason why I'm so popular today—simply because of the way I played."

I follow his lead. "You mean by the wording of the agreement you signed?"

"Yes. The agreement says there's no finding that Pete Rose bet on baseball."

Rose has been banned from baseball since Aug. 24, 1989. As Rose watched on television, then commissioner Bart Giamatti read a carefully vague statement at a New York City press conference: "One of the game's greatest players has engaged in a variety of acts which have stained the game, and he must now live with the consequences of those acts."

"Then he sets it down," Rose says, "and [he's asked], 'Do you think he bet on baseball?' And he says yes. We should have went in there immediately and said, 'We're withdrawing.'"

"But that's water over the dam. Hey, Bart did what he had to do. I have no qualms with Bart Giamatti. When you screw up like I screwed up, I'm not going to whine about not being in the Hall of Fame."

Much less famously, Giamatti took another question that resonates louder today. A reporter asked him if the ban would have any bearing on Rose's Hall of Fame chances. Giamatti dismissed the link. "You," he told the baseball writers in the room, "will decide whether he belongs in the Hall of Fame."

They never did. On Jan. 10, 1991, just 10 months before Rose's name would appear on ballots mailed to voting members of the Baseball Writers Association of America, a special

committee appointed by the Hall's board of directors met at a New York City hotel. The committee recommended the addition of clause 3E to the BBWAA Rules of Election: "Any player on Baseball's ineligible list shall not be an eligible candidate."

Joe Jackson, who was placed on the ineligible list for his presumed role in the 1919 Black Sox gambling scandal, had appeared on a BBWAA Hall of Fame ballot in 1936. Jackson, a lifetime .356 hitter, received just two votes. Rose never will get that chance.

Rose applied to commissioner Rob Manfred for reinstatement in March and hopes to meet with him as soon as next month. Unless the Hall of Fame retracts clause 3E, Manfred holds the key to both Rose's reinstatement and his Hall of Fame eligibility. (The commissioner, a lawyer, has appointed his senior adviser John McHale Jr. to gather the history and evidence of the case. Manfred plans to meet with Rose but has not determined when. Rose faces an uphill battle, if only because no one banned for gambling has ever been reinstated.)

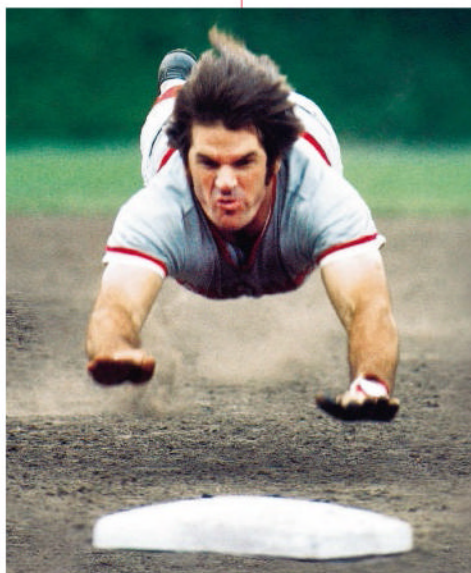
Rose is no longer eligible for the writers' ballot, which is restricted to players who were active during a period beginning 15 years prior to the election. If reinstated by Manfred, he would be considered by the 16-member Expansion Era committee, which meets every three years (next in 2016). "There's guys in the Hall of Fame that made mistakes, which is fine," Rose says. "They got a second chance. They got a second chance."

He remembers the first Hall of Famer he played against: Stan Musial, who was inducted in 1969. Musial is one of 77 enshrined players who were active when Rose played or managed.

"No, it doesn't get much easier," Rose says. "I don't want you to sit here and think before I go to bed at night I'm going to pray that I go to the Hall of Fame. I'm going to pray that I get up tomorrow morning. Seriously. Because I'm 74 years old, and there's a hell of a lot more behind me than there is in front of me."

I glance over to him behind the wheel of the Bentley. He is pale. Though it is cool in the car, a bead of perspiration sits on his temple.

"What good is the Hall of Fame going to do me if they put me in after I die? For my kids? Because my kids and my



AIRBORNE

Rose's reckless abandon served him better on the base paths than off the field, where his excesses would cost him dearly.



grandkids, I think they have an idea of how happy I would be if I went into the Hall of Fame, and not go in a year after I die where they have to be up there without me.”

The greatest night of Rose’s baseball life was at Cincinnati’s Riverfront Stadium on Sept. 11, 1985, when he broke Ty Cobb’s all-time record for hits. “I got a nine-minute standing ovation,” he says. “Nine f---ing minutes.”

On July 14, Rose will be honored by Major League Baseball before the All-Star Game at Cincinnati’s Great American Ballpark as one of the four greatest players in Reds history (along with Johnny Bench, Joe Morgan and Barry Larkin). Rose, who is barred from working for any club or being in any part of a ballpark or training facility not open to general ticket holders, received permission from MLB to attend the event. Barring reinstatement or Hall enshrinement, the All-Star ceremony in his hometown will likely be the greatest acknowledgment of his baseball life, similar to the one afforded Ted Williams before the All-Star Game in Boston in 1999. Williams, Hall of Fame class of 1966, was 80 years old, six years older than Rose is now. Williams was dead three years later.

“I’ll have my day with the commissioner,” Rose says. “Believe me, I’ll tell him everything I did as a player and a manager 30 years ago and everything I’m doing today. And the chips will fall where they fall. There’s no way he’s not going to understand I’ve reconfigured my life. I’m a good citizen now. I work hard. I support my family.

“You know, in the last 30 years you don’t remember reading about me being in a bar, or being in a fight, or running a red light or beating up some woman or being on drugs. No troubles. I bet on baseball. I f---ed up. And you know all the other stuff? Not guilty.

“But some people want to make me out to be a bad guy. I’m a great guy. I love fans. I’m the best with fans. I’m a regular guy and I make people feel down to earth.” He pauses for a slight grin to crease his face. “I’m a regular guy with a s---pot full of hits.”

“But Pete, first you said you didn’t bet on baseball, and you did. You said you didn’t bet on baseball as a player, and last month ESPN reported that you did. Should baseball be concerned about what’s going to come next from Pete Rose?”



HIGH AND LOW

The apex of Rose’s career—breaking Cobb’s career hits record (above)—was followed four years later by its nadir, his banishment from the game (opposite).



“There ain’t nothing going to come [from] the last 30 years. . . . My nose is clean. I’m a good citizen. I’m remorseful. I love the game. I love to talk about the game. I’ll present my case to Mr. Manfred, and he’ll know if I’m bulls---ting him or not. He won’t get no bulls--- from me.”

MILE 99. Zzyzx, Calif.

In 1944 a doctor and Methodist minister named Curtis Howe Springer built a health spa in the desert on federal land after making a mining claim. He touted his hot springs and named the place Zzyzx so it would be known as “the last word in health.”

It turned out Springer was neither a doctor nor a minister.

He had fabricated nearly everything about his background. The hot springs were pools heated by a boiler. In 1969 the American Medical Association called Springer the King of Quacks. In 1974 he was found guilty of squatting on federal land and evicted. He moved to Las Vegas, where he died on Aug. 19, 1985, 23 days before Rose broke Cobb’s record.

RECONFIGURE YOUR life,” Rose says. All these years later the famous words still swirl around his mouth like a bracing rinse. “It took me years to figure out what he meant.”

The 1989 agreement with Giamatti stipulated that Rose could apply for reinstatement in a year. “To think I’m going to be out for a short period of time hurts,” Rose said at the time. In what passed for the only road map back, Giamatti said, “The burden is entirely on Mr. Rose to reconfigure his life in a way he deems appropriate.” What the heck did that mean? *Reconfigure his life?* The mystery deepened eight days later: Giamatti, 51, dropped dead from a heart attack.

“I finally figured it out,” Rose says. “When he said it, I thought he meant to get away from the bookies and the scumbags that I was hanging around with, which I did. What he meant was to take responsibility for what I did. And when I finally figured out what he meant, that’s when I finally took responsibility for what I did.”

Another popular reading of the map to reinstatement is that Rose needed to clean up his act, not just disassociate himself from bookies and scumbags. On the night of his ban Rose appeared on a shopping channel hawking memorabilia. He moved about 10 years ago to Las Vegas, the gambling capital of the world. He has regularly showed up in Cooperstown, N.Y., during Hall of Fame induction ceremonies to peddle his autograph. He wrote

“I’LL HAVE MY DAY WITH [MANFRED], AND THE CHIPS WILL FALL WHERE THEY FALL. I’M A GOOD CITIZEN NOW. I WORK HARD. I SUPPORT MY FAMILY.”

one book denying he bet on baseball and then another one admitting that he bet on baseball; the publisher released the latter two days after the Hall of Fame voting results were announced. Rose’s critics say he ignored Giamatti’s map.

“Well, he still gambles, because he lives in Las Vegas,” Rose says in the voice of his critics. “Let me tell you something about Las Vegas. A million and a half people live in Las Vegas, and Las Vegas is the only town in the world where my gig works.” “Why is that?”

“It’s simply because every three or four days half a million people leave and half a million come in. Last year 40 million people visited Las Vegas. And what do most of them have in common? They have money to spend—and they want to see a celebrity.”

Rose used to sign autographs on Las Vegas Boulevard. Then one day it rained. The owner of a memorabilia shop at the Forum Shops at Caesars invited him to sign that day indoors at his place. Business boomed. “And I never went back [outside],” Rose says. “Before the recession hit in 2007, 2008, I used to work at the Forum Shops 15 days a month. And I averaged \$20,000 a day [in sales]. That’s \$300,000 a month or \$3.6 million a year. Obviously now we don’t do that, but we still do O.K.”

Rose has since moved to another shop, signing autographs from noon to 4:30 p.m. as often as 25 days a month. “To me it’s like playing a double-header every day,” he says, making sure to point out he does not operate out of a casino, as is often reported. “You don’t sign at a casino. I’m at Mandalay Place, not at Mandalay Bay. I’ve probably signed more free autographs than anybody, and I’ve probably sold more autographs for money than anybody. I know I’m right.

“I do it, one, because I like it. Two, I have to make a living. I’ve got bills. Three, it’s very convenient. I live 1.1 miles from where I work.”

This year Rose will not be signing autographs in Cooperstown during induction weekend. “I just think it’s kind of a cooling-off period,” he says. “I’ve never understood why people get mad when I go to Cooperstown. The press makes it out like I’m the only guy who goes to Cooperstown who’s not in the Hall of Fame. There’s 40 guys up there signing. And believe me, I get big lines up there. It’s fun. It’s a fun village. The Hall of Fame is unbelievable.

“I mean, it should be on everyone’s bucket list.”

MILE 184. Apple Valley, Calif.

Leonard Franklin Slye was born on Nov. 5, 1911, in a tenement building in Cincinnati almost exactly where Rose’s record-breaking hit would land 74 years later at Riverfront Stadium. The boy moved at age seven to a farm in Duck Run, Ohio, dropped out of

high school to work with his father at a shoe factory and later moved with him to California, taking blue-collar jobs such as driving gravel trucks and picking peaches.

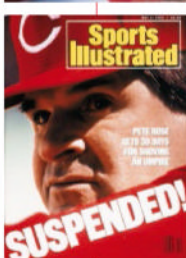
Slye eventually launched a successful music and acting career. He changed his name in 1938 to something more marketable and later settled in Apple Valley, where he died and was buried in 1998. On his tombstone is carved his birth name, not the name for which he was renowned: Roy Rogers.

RULE 21(D) is merciless, more unforgiving than the Mojave Desert in July. Rule 21(d) was drafted by commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis in 1927 in response not only to the 1919 Black Sox scandal but also to the frequent connections between gamblers and baseball in the first quarter of the century. The rule declares “permanently ineligible” any player, umpire or baseball employee who “shall bet any sum whatsoever upon any baseball game in connection with which the bettor has a duty to perform.” Rose knew the deal. Everybody does.

The day after our road trip, while Rose is preparing for his studio gig, resplendent in cream-colored ostrich boots and a purple shirt buttoned at the neck, I will ask him if he had a gambling problem when he was banned. “When you lose a career, you have to face reality,” he will say. “I went to Gamblers Anonymous meetings when I was getting counseling. I looked around at the other people. There were people who were stealing from their moms and dads, people embezzling from their companies. . . . I wasn’t like that. I quit going. It depressed me. What do I have in common with these people? I feel sorry for them and hope they get things fixed, but. . . .”

What would Landis think of America today? Nevada legalized gambling in 1931, four years after Landis wrote 21(d). Thirty-seven states have followed with commercial or tribal gaming. Many major league ballparks feature signage advertising casinos. MLB boasts a partnership with an “official daily fantasy game” in which fans can lay money to win money based on player performance. “We’re

battling history here,” Rose says. “I don’t think in the eyes of some people that any kind of gambling will ever be tolerable in baseball because of 1919. When I made my mistakes, I was betting illegally. I haven’t made an illegal bet since 1988. That part of my life is gone.”



The report by MLB investigator John Dowd included testimony from associates that Rose bet on baseball in 1986, when he was player-manager for the Reds. The recent ESPN report added documentary evidence of the claim.

"What's the story?" I ask him.

"I promised [Manfred] when I applied for reinstatement that I wouldn't make no statements about anything involving him or reinstatement stuff," Rose says. "And I've lived up to that."

"Hey, listen, I want this commissioner to be the most successful ever. It's just a shame that I'm not in a position where I could help him, help the game. Because I believe baseball is a better game with me in it. It's because of the passion I have for the players and the fans."

Rose steers the Bentley off I-15 onto California State Route 138. We stop for gas on a two-lane stretch of the road. Rose always stops at this dusty, modest station with one pump island. He stops here because he has made friends with the attendant, who could pass for a modern-day Whiskey Pete, with jeans that droop so low as to reveal most of his gray underwear. Rose often brings him signed jerseys and baseballs as gifts. I tell him I know what he can bring his friend the next time he stops for gas.

"Get him a belt."

MILE 217. Pearblossom, Calif.

In April 1986, while Rose began his last season as a player, British artist David Hockney, on assignment for *Vanity Fair*, drove out West with a friend. They stopped on California State Route 138 at the western edge of the Mojave Desert as it meets the San Gabriels. It occurred to Hockney that a driver and a passenger see the road in different ways. Hockney used about 750 photographs to create a six-by-nine-foot collage capturing the distinction between those perspectives. *Pearblossom Hwy, 11-18th April 1986, #2* hangs in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. An empty road intersects the empty Pearblossom Highway under an empty, brilliant blue desert sky. It is a serene tableau of open space that invites perspectives.

In reality, as more people in more cars dashed between L.A. and Vegas, Pearblossom Highway—with its twisting two-lane stretches never meant for such volume or such haste—became one of the most dangerous roads in the country. It is referred to as Blood Alley and Deathtrap Highway.

PEN PAL

Rose (in 2007) makes a handsome living in Vegas affixing his signature to baseballs and all other kinds of memorabilia.



PETE ROSE is about volume. Games, hits, statistics, records, autographs, f-bombs . . . doesn't matter. The man with one of the most wonderfully terse baseball names ("Good thing I wasn't Ted Kluszewski," he jokes about his autograph prowess) is the Hoover Dam of all things but letters. His recall is tremendous. He is a repository of statistics, especially his own.

He tells you without hesitation that he is a career .303 hitter, including .307 against righthanders, .293 against lefthanders and .302 against 19 Hall of Fame pitchers (his math is only a bit off; it's .303 against 22 pitchers in the Hall); that of his 4,256 hits he had 10 more on the road than at home; that Musial had 1,815 hits at home and exactly that number on the road; and that the Big Red Machine is the only team in history with a Hall of Fame manager (Sparky Anderson), a white Hall of Famer (Bench), a black Hall of Famer (Morgan) and a Latino Hall of Famer (Tony Perez).

"Are you born with work ethic or is it something you see when you're around a certain individual?" he asks before answering his own question. "Because my dad was a workaholic. My dad was a hustler. So was I. Because I saw him do it."

According to his calendar online, Rose signed autographs at Mandalay Place for 25 days in January (the NFL playoffs are good for business) and 22 in March (college basketball).

He signed autographs on 113 of the first 181 days of 2015. After a travel day following the All-Star Game, Rose is scheduled to sign for 15 of the next 16 days.

On the night before our trip, Pete was in Washington, Pa., outside of Pittsburgh, for an appearance at the ballpark of the Washington Wild Things, an independent team. Rose spoke to the players before the game. He signed autographs for the fans who purchased the \$100 VIP package ("a personal meet and greet and a photo with Rose himself") or paid \$40 to have Rose sign an item they were required to purchase from the team's merchandise store. The announced crowd was 1,775. It was one of several appearances Rose plans to make at Frontier League games.

"He will go anywhere to make a buck," wrote Ron Cook of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

"What is wrong with him?" Rose says. "Is my family supposed to starve? Because I took a plane for 4½ hours to throw out the first pitch and talk to the players and motivate them and talk to the fans and coach first and go up in the stands and sign autographs for two hours? Is there something wrong with that?"

MILE 267. Santa Clarita, Calif.

On March 9, 1842, Francisco Lopez took a nap under an oak tree in what today is Santa Clarita and then was known as

"I DON'T THINK IN THE EYES OF SOME PEOPLE THAT ANY KIND OF GAMBLING WILL EVER BE TOLERABLE IN BASEBALL. I HAVEN'T MADE AN ILLEGAL BET SINCE '88."

Rancho San Francisco. As the legend goes, Lopez dreamed he was floating in a pool of gold. When he awoke, he pulled wild onions from the ground and, having studied mineralogy at the University of Mexico, immediately recognized the metallic flakes clinging to the roots: gold. It was the first gold discovered in California—six years before the discovery at Sutter's Mill. Today the so-called Oak of the Golden Dream is a designated California Historical Landmark.

LIKE I was telling a guy on the plane," Rose says, "every f---ing day I wake up, something different hurts. Man, it's rough to get old. That's why you've got to keep your mind young. Young players keep you young."

"Could you manage today?"

"Oh, yeah."

"What if the GM came down to the office and showed you metrics about who to play?"

"I couldn't manage then."

What he really misses is working with young players. He dreams of standing behind the batting cage as Reds outfielder Billy Hamilton takes his cuts and helping the struggling hitter keep the ball out of the air.

Rose has managed one game since his ban from Major League Baseball. It was last year, on June 16. He managed the independent Bridgeport (Conn.) Bluefish, a stunt made possible by Ken Shepard, the team's creative general manager. Shepard, then 49, had spent more than two decades in minor league baseball, starting in Geneva, N.Y., where he once vowed to sleep in the press box until his team broke a losing streak (he slept there 12 nights) and continuing to places such as Wilmington, Del., where he married his wife, Tonya, in a home-plate ceremony that included skydivers in tuxedos and fireworks over the outfield.

Getting Rose to manage a game was a coup. Reporters from national media outlets flocked to Bridgeport. Attendance doubled that night. Rose had his players diving headfirst into bases. The crowd loved it. The Bluefish won the game 2–0.

After the game Shepard drove Rose back to his hotel. "Pete," Shepard said, "I want to thank you for making my swan song in baseball what it was tonight."

Rose was dumbfounded. Swan song? He could tell that Shepard, a former college ballplayer who still looked to be in playing shape, loved baseball. He lived in Pennsylvania with

they can't do anything about. I'm going to spend the last two months with my family."

"And you worked your ass off for this f---ing game?"

"Yes, because it's my passion. It was my passion to have you here and to have the crowd that we had. And that's going to be my legacy with this team—that we had the best game we could ever have, the last thing I did for this team."

The Bluefish scheduled a Ken Shepard Day for Sept. 14. Rose agreed to return to manage the team for the day. On Sept. 5, Shepard died at his home, surrounded by family. The shaken Rose couldn't go back to Bridgeport. He was replaced as manager for the day by Tonya Shepard.

"I just didn't want to go through that," Rose says. "He was such a nice guy, and what kind of night could it be at the ballpark when the guy died the week before? You just never know, man. This guy looked as healthy as can be."

Rose pulls the Bentley into a rental-car parking lot, where I will pick up a more modest set of wheels to take me to a downtown hotel. Two hundred sixty-seven miles passed quickly. I thank him for generously sharing his ride and his time. He pops the lid of the trunk, where I have placed my suitcase. Then I push the button on the trunk lid to close it, and for the first time I notice his Nevada license plate: HITKING.

I have to laugh. It's the ultimate Rose accessory, better than the cream-colored ostrich boots. What a country. The scrappy kid from Cincinnati who was thrown out of baseball is engaged to a 35-year-old model and drives a Bentley financed by his signature and festooned with a HITKING license plate.

Reconfigure his life? Does the road teach us nothing? This is America, land of gambling entrepreneurs, hucksters, singing cowboys, artists and golden dreamers. And that's just on the drive from Vegas to L.A.

Rose fits. He is roadside America. He is a real-life Hockney collage—one picture made from hundreds, a quirky assemblage that invites different perspectives. *Hustler, huckster, dreamer, rogue, commoner, entertainer, legend* and *ambassador* are but a few of the appellations from which to choose, but one that can't be denied is *74-year-old grandfather looking for a second chance*.

I give the butt of the Bentley a gentle tap, the way ballplayers do to one another for a job well done or a wish for better luck next time. I watch as the Bentley rolls off, the HITKING reminder getting smaller and smaller until I can no longer read it. But I know it's still there. □





Uniformly Bounded

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

IN HER LAST game before joining the U.S. Women's National Team this summer, Carli Lloyd scored the game-winning goal . . . for her opponents. And nobody cared. Only 2,376 people were present to see the National Women's Soccer League's Boston Breakers win at home that day.

Lloyd went on to become an American sports hero, scoring a hat trick in the Women's World Cup Final, and now returns to her professional team, which is called the Houston Dash. But you knew that, right? Of course you did.

Why do we marvel at certain athletes on one stage and ignore them on another? The Cup Final drew a 15.2 TV rating, comparable to last season's college football playoff semifinal games. But I bet you can't name the 10 teams in the NWSL. (Hint: There are only nine.)

People often say that Americans don't watch women's sports. But we do. We watch Lindsey Vonn and Missy Franklin at the Olympics. We will surely watch Serena Williams try to win the calendar-year Grand Slam at the U.S. Open later this summer. And we were thrilled to watch Lloyd the moment she exchanged her Dash kit for the red, white and blue. Why won't we watch her when she changes back?

Thirty years ago our nation was littered with fat, lazy, cigarette-smoking men who declared, without irony, that women could not be athletes. Two generations of brilliant female athletes have convinced most of America that the opposite is true.

So maybe this isn't about gender at all. It's about the marketplace. America has more than 100 major professional sports teams. Whatever we need in this country—nicer politicians, better funding for education, toilet-seat covers that stay on the toilet seat—we don't need more teams.

If you live in a major metropolitan area and care about sports, you already have favorite teams. New teams need years to capture a city's heart. Athletes can't simply walk down Walnut Street in Philadelphia and say, "I work for you."

Really? Do you make sure my garbage gets picked up? "Oh, no. I play soccer for you." *Uh, thanks for that.*

"Now pay me."

WHAT?

We watch sports if the sport is familiar enough, the

Maybe the
lack of an
audience for
women's
pro soccer
isn't about
gender
at all.
Maybe it's
about the
marketplace.



Can the NWSL
catch on?

Join the
discussion on
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and following

@Rosenberg_Mike

quality of play is high enough and we have some other compelling reason. Professional women's soccer checks off the first two boxes but not yet the third.

For people who say that the best women are not as athletic as the best men, I say, So what? Last year's Wisconsin Badgers men's basketball team was not nearly as talented as the NBA's Bucks yet drew more fans to its home games. UW sports mean something in that state. You can't create that feeling with a marketing campaign.

Women can play soccer well enough to hold our attention. That's not the issue. We just don't have a compelling reason to watch . . . unless they are playing for our country. Beat Kansas City, and we yawn. We've got nothing against Kansas City. It would be a lovely place to visit if they ever replace that toy airport with a real one. But beat the rest of the world, and that gets the blood flowing.

We are a nation of rabid sports fans, but we have quirks. We are ravenous for college football but largely indifferent toward college baseball; our explanation is that we have minor league baseball, but we aren't particularly passionate about that, either.

We were fascinated by Lance Armstrong's Tour de France victories but now wouldn't watch the world's best cyclists if they raced down our street. Major League Soccer, which is in the middle of its 20th season, needed years to convince us it was worth our time. And in baseball, we have inverted our normal us-against-the-world viewing habits: The World Series matters most, and the World Baseball Classic feels like a marketing gimmick.

The Women's World Cup was a major event—not just for women's soccer, but in sports. Women's professional soccer feels like what it is: a start-up. Someday, a women's sports start-up will achieve massive success in this country. The employees are certainly ready. □



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